

WATERBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SPRING 2021

Volume 22, Number 1

Waterbury's Response to Racial Injustice

A Look at Anti-Racism Efforts Over the Years

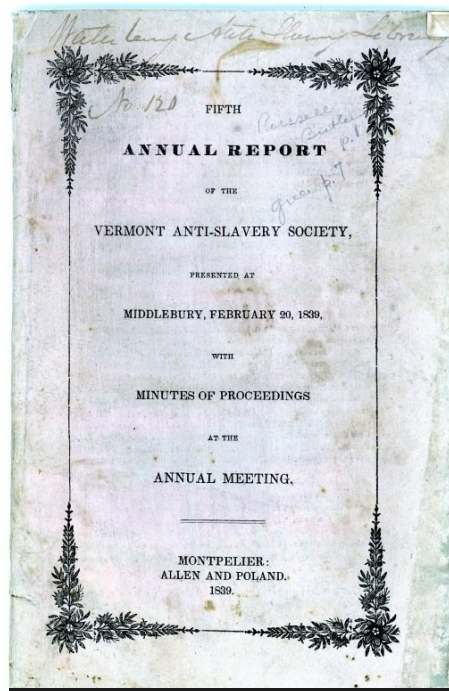
By Jane Willard

Vermont's independent spirit was evident in our state's early history. On July 2, 1777, there was an abolitionist's call to end slavery. Vermont became the first colony to ban slavery. The Legislature moved to provide full voting rights for African American males. Years later, on November 25, 1858, Vermont supported this commitment by ratifying a stronger anti-slavery law into its constitution. Quaker-led abolitionist movements were taking root. Regardless of good intentions, African Americans continued to be treated poorly. It was difficult for "free" blacks to find work or own property.

According to Theodore Graham Lewis in his *History of Waterbury, Vermont*, our community played a significant role in the Anti-Slavery movement. Lewis writes, "Waterbury was chosen as a desirable place and July 1 and 2 (1841) as a suitable time for an Anti-Slavery Convention." The following advertisement appeared and was widely circulated throughout central Vermont:

The friends of Abolition, in Waterbury and vicinity, apprise their friends through the State, that entertainment will be provided for those who come from abroad to attend the Anti-Slavery Convention, notified to be holden at said Waterbury the 1st and 2nd days of July 1841. Should any come into town on Wednesday evening to attend the convention, those coming from the North will call on Rev. Mr. Hall at Waterbury Center, who will direct them to places of entertainment; and those coming from other directions will find some friend at the public house in Waterbury Street, who will give them like direction.

By order of the Executive Committee of the Waterbury and Duxbury Anti-Slavery Society, Erastus Parker – Chair.



The cover of the Fifth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society from their February 20, 1839 meeting.

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Planning Begins for Outdoor Programs

By Cheryl Casey

Spring has sprung, and along with tulip bulbs, hope for release from pandemic-imposed isolation and Zoom events has begun to peek through the winter gloom.

At this time, the Historical Society is planning for a number of outdoor events later this spring and this summer. The Ghost Walk committee, led by Jan Gendreau, is in process of selecting a theme and historical Waterbury personalities. The committee is excited to lead a walk through Hope Cemetery on Memorial Day, in accordance with pandemic guidelines

The Program Committee is similarly working on arrangements for the annual picnic in July. More information about these events will come in the next newsletter issue, on our website, and on Facebook.

In This Issue

- Longtime member celebrated as centenarian
- Mystery Photo updates
- Annual Appeal gratitude
- Featured Figure—Florilla Ames celebrates 110!

He has a positive attitude about everything he sees. The glass is always half full."

—Andrea Mosbacher, Calvin Dow's daughter



Local activist Calvin Dow, of Danbury, marked his 100th birthday Monday.

H John Voorhees III / Hearst Connecticut Media

A CENTURY OF LIFE

Longtime Danbury resident, activist celebrates 100th birthday

Waterbury Center native Calvin Dow was featured in *The News-Times*, a Danbury, CT, newspaper, for his 100th birthday this past December. Photo courtesy of Calvin Dow.

Waterbury Center Centenarian Celebrated with CT Newspaper Feature

By Calvin Dow

A man who was born 100 years ago in Waterbury Center, Vermont, has made the front page of the Danbury, CT, *The News-Times*.

Long-time contributor to the Waterbury Historical Society and political activist, Calvin Dow celebrated 100 years of fantastic life on December 28, 2020.

He is now working on his New Year's resolutions for his crusades in 2021.

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor,

What was the population of Waterbury and Waterbury Center in the year 1940? What was it in the year 2010?

*Your Connecticut Member
Calvin Dow*

Editor's Note:

Dear Calvin,

Census data reports don't separate out Waterbury Center from the town population, but I do have the population counts for the town and village for each of these census years.

In 1940, Waterbury Town had a population of 4,118, while the Village recorded 3,074 inhabitants. According to the 2010 census data, the Town had 5,064 inhabitants. The Village, however, had dropped to 1,763.

To the Editor:

Thanks for the newsletter. I found the "25Club" article interesting. I remember seeing Mr. Demerit's vehicle down around where my family lived at 168 So. Main.

Of course, Mr. Demerit ran the mill out behind us. Demerit's mill as we knew it by. My grandfather was listed in the newsletter as one of the members. I never knew that or him growing up. L.J. Garvey or Lewis Jay. I will be looking for more info down rather road if any shows up. What did the "25" come from?

*Ken Talbert
Lenoir, NC*

Editor's Note:

Dear Ken,

The origins, mission, and naming of the "25 Club" are unclear. Anyone with additional information is encouraged to reach out to article author Bob Ayers, bjayers766@comcast.net.

To the Editor:

Thank you for the stories. Chris Palermo and John Woodruff supported me in the death of my daughter and my husband. I was most grateful for them. They made everything simple. The other stories were interesting. Thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

*Mary Vecchione
Waterbury*



Waterbury-area community members gathered last year in Rusty Parker Park to protest and raise awareness about systemic racism. The event was organized by WAARC.

Photo credit: Dana Allen of DW Media House. Courtesy of waterburyantiracism.com

Anti-Racism in Waterbury

Continued from page 1

The Society remained active over the years. In 1860 the radical Abolitionists and the Democratic Party denounced President Lincoln's weak stance on abolition during his first administration. Waterbury responded to the call for troops in 1861 and much interesting history is associated with the local troops' response to the Civil War.

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be documentation of Waterbury's response to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950's and 60's.

It is heartening to know that in 2020 a Waterbury Area Anti-Racism Coalition (WAARC) was established. According to the Coalition's web-site, this movement grew out of a multiracial, multi-generational group of community members who gathered to organize a Rally Against Racism on June 4, 2020 in Waterbury.

WAARC seeks to build energy and insights of that first rally by working to create a community where every person can fully experience freedom, belonging, and love on a daily basis. We are committed to challenging racism at all levels, including interpersonal racism (both conscious and unconscious acts) and systemic racism (our local institutions and policies). We will work toward a better future through education, advocacy, and activism.

WAARC presented a *Declaration of Inclusion* to the Waterbury Select Board in 2021.

"Waterbury condemns racism and welcomes all people regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age or disability, and protects these classes to the fullest extent of law. As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all forms and commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community. Waterbury has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinion."

After discussion, a motion was made and seconded to adopt the declaration – it passed unanimously!

Imagine a meeting of the Friends of Abolition from our past and WAARC today – what a rich discussion it would be!

**A BIG THANK
YOU TO JOHN
ZIMMERMAN FOR
ANSWERING
OUR CALL FOR A
DONATED SLIDE
PROJECTOR!**

SUBMIT CONTENT

To submit a letter to the editor, stories, or photos for an upcoming issue, email the editor at communitymgr.whs@gmail.com or send by post to: Dr. Cheryl Casey, 1389 Kneeland Flats Rd., Waterbury Center, VT 05677.

*Quarterly submission deadlines:
February 15, May 15, August 15, and November 15*

New Members

Joe Comaratta
Waterbury Center, VT

Gary & Sally Dillon
Waterbury, VT

Nick & Sue Gruschow
Waterbury Center, VT

Katy Martin
Waterbury, VT

Susan Mazza
Waterbury, VT

Lisa Scagliotti
Waterbury, VT

Bruce Spaulding
Swanton, VT

Myra Ummel
Morton, IL

Ed Ziedins
Waterbury Center, VT

*We are thrilled
to welcome so
many new
members this
quarter!*

Donations

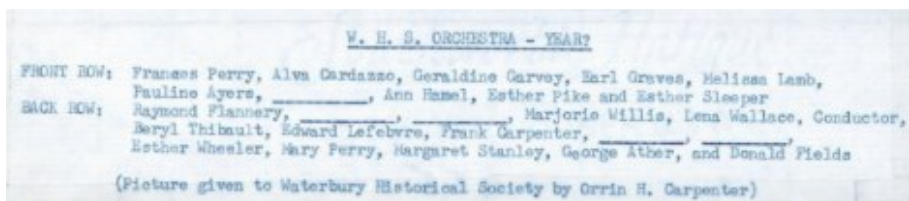
**Marshall-Carney Family
Charitable Fund**
In memory of the
Marshall Family, \$250.00

Gordy & Theresa Wood
Newsletter, \$25.00



In our last issue, we sought information about this Waterbury High School orchestra, hoping to fill in some of the missing names and the year.

This label taped to the back of the photo frame is unable to identify the fourth student from the right. Our own research concluded that this student was Mary Riggs.



We heard from member Rose Barnes Farkas, currently of The Villages, Florida, that her mother, Mary Riggs, is seated at the right end of the first row (circled above)—a student originally labeled as Esther Sleeper.

If anyone has information that can help clear up the first row confusion or fill in the missing names in the back row, please contact the Editor at communitymgr.whs@gmail.com

**WHS deeply appreciates
Karen Steele for her
ongoing support and
generosity.
Thank you, Karen, for all
you do for WHS!**

WHS IS GRATEFUL TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE FOR THEIR EXTRAORDINARY GENEROSITY IN OUR **2020 Annual Appeal**

Lynne Alden
Jeffrey Amestoy
William & Susan April
Robert Ayers
Jeremy Ayers
Richard Ayers
Willis Backus
Elaine Beal
Milton & Joan Beard
Susan Bell
Barbara Blauvelt
Elizabeth Bordeaux
Judy Burkhard
Geraldine Callan
Monica Callan & Peter Holm
Karen Carpenedo
Jack Carter
Jim & Lorrie Casey
Cheryl Casey & Chad Ummel
Joanna & Stephen Caswell
Susan Chalmers
David Chase
Jerry Chase
Eileen Chittick
George Clement
David Cutter
Ann Dedell
Gary & Sally Dillon
Greg & Suzanne Dirmaier
Rebecca Ellis
Greg & Jane Evans
Jenny Evjen
Barb Farr & Marc Metayer
Karen Fiebig
Dwight & Martha Fiske
Roger & Martha Fraser
Judith Gale
Jan Gendreau

Shirley Gilman
Joanne Goyette
Steve & Breta Grace
Robert & Kathryn Grace
Alan Grout
Harold & Shirley Grout
Ronald & Marge Gulyas
James Hanley
Judy Harriman
Paul & Patricia Haverstick
Job Heintz & Christina
Pellechio
Marty & Sue Johansen
Alyssa Johnson
Bob & Betty Jones
Ben & Rachael Keaton
James & Theresa King
Cathy Jo & Luther Leake
Al & Sandy Lewis
Brian Lindner
Annette Litchfield
James Lovely
Kathleen Lumbr
David & Elizabeth MacGowan
Sharon MacMahan
John Malter
Robert Mcleod
Josette & David Metayer
Erin Mooney & Peter Plagge
Mark & Bonnie Morse
Nancy Murphy
Herschell Murray
Gene & Eric Nelson
Old Stagecoach Inn
Jess & Michael Paddock
Christopher & Terri Palermo
Laura & Bob Parette
Loleta Perry

Cecile & Don Phillips
Judith Poirier
Kathy Powell
Ed & Susan Rau
Carolyn Ritter
Edward & Linda Robbins
Kevin & Debbie Rogers
Meredith Rogers
Rebecca Rutledge
Charles & Margo Sayah
Wilford & Sue Sayah
Lawrence Sayah
Don Schneider & MK Monley
Dale Smeltzer
Stephen & Adrienne Soule
Karen Steele
Mary Jean Sturgis
Ruth Sugg
Beverly Sweeney
Tom & Grace sweet
Ken & Sharon Talbert
Mark & Constance Tuft
Stephen Van Esen
Mary Vecchione
Shirley Viens
John & Val Vincent
David Vincent
K. Alan Wallace
A. James Walton
Donald & Mary Welch
Paul & Jane Willard
Gordon & Theresa Wood
Scott Wood
George Woodard
John & Judy Woodruff
Mr. & Mrs. Wulff
Harrie Yandow
Edward & Kathleen Ziedins

Featured Figure: Florilla Ames at 110

Two pandemics on, still going strong

By Cheryl Casey

On a chilly but bright March morning, Betty Jones, 84, raps on the door of an old shingled farmhouse on Barnes Hill Road in Waterbury Center, a cheerily-wrapped bundle under her arm. Her errand is to drop in on her old friend Florilla Ames and convey birthday wishes from the Waterbury Center Community Church, of which both women are longtime members. The next day, March 17, Florilla will celebrate her 110th birthday.

Born to Arthur and Ida Perkins in 1911, Florilla grew up on the family farm on Barnes Hill. As a girl, she learned to sew, joined other children on sleigh rides to school in winter, and paid a dime to ride the electric trolley between Waterbury and Stowe.

When the 1918 flu pandemic came to Waterbury, everyone in the house, except for Florilla's oldest brother, got sick at the same time. "People died here in Waterbury. It was terrible. A whole family died next door to us," she said, but "we came through it."

Florilla reflected that the current pandemic is "worse than the first one" because people now have enough information to know better. "They were taken by surprise" when the flu broke out, she said, adding, "They had nothing to compare it with. They knew nothing about it. They didn't have the things to work with they've got now. Nothing. Nothing."

During high school, Florilla would often stay with friends on Randall Street since the Village was such a long trek from Barnes Hill. It was one of these nights in early November 1927 that someone ran door-to-door to warn Randall Street residents that the Winooski waters were rising. She recalled fleeing with others to the High School, with the aid of a gentleman who carried her on his back. There she waited out the receding waters and returned home when the roads were finally passable again.

In 1928, Florilla graduated from Waterbury High School and went on to earn her teaching certificate from Lyndon Institute. Her first two years of teaching were at the one-room schoolhouse on Loomis Hill in Waterbury Center. The school was located at what is now the intersection of Loomis Hill and Shaw Mansion Roads. She then went on to teach for another eight years in Derby Line. "I've never worked so hard in my life," Florilla concluded of that period.

One thing Florilla liked to do as a young woman was listen to music. Perry Como was one of her favorites, preferring him over Frank Sinatra. "I loved Nat King Cole. We had some beautiful music back then," she added. As for Elvis Presley, "I didn't like him at all. All his wiggling and twisting," Florilla declared.

While teaching in Derby Line in 1938, Florilla met Darryl Ames, who she would marry later that year. The pair were married for 70 years, until his death at the age of 94 in 2008.

At one point during her reminiscences, Florilla's landline phone rings loudly, causing all of the room's captivated occupants to jump from the interruption. After listening to the person on the other end of the line for a moment, Florilla replies, "I'm busy right now. I'll have to call you back." When the caller tries again 20 minutes later, they are met with the centenarian's quick retort: "Yeah, well, I'm still busy. Call back!"

Although her vision and hearing are failing and "very painful arthritis" plagues her legs and feet, Florilla remains sharp as a tack. She spends much of her time enjoying her many geranium plants - "I couldn't live without them," she insisted - and listening to audiobooks delivered regularly by the ABLE Library, part of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. Florilla recalled that three years ago, she asked them how many audiobooks she had borrowed from them, and they

tallied about 1800. The audiobooks keep coming, and "Anything they send, I like," she stated.

For her birthday on St. Patrick's Day, Florilla requested a meal of corned beef and cabbage. Her housekeeper also had a cake stashed away in the refrigerator.

Until last year, Florilla would host an open house for her birthday, but "we got word of this disease coming in, and so the party didn't materialize," she explained. A sign on the door went up declaring no visitors.

Party or not, what is Florilla's secret to living so long? "I take my time," she quipped.

Editor's Note: This story is a shortened version of an article that first appeared in the Waterbury Roundabout and the Times Argus, March 17, 2021.



Left: Florilla Ames holds up her birthday gift, delivered by Betty Jones, from the Waterbury Center Community Church, which she has been a member of for 98 years. Right: Florilla's graduation photo, Waterbury High School class of 1928.



WATERBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORY CENTER

The History Center is open **Monday—Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** Located on the second floor of the Municipal Building in the newly renovated Dr. Janes house, the museum is free and open to the public. The Historical Society's vast collections rotate through the exhibits, which are carefully assembled by our Curator. Stop by and learn something new about Waterbury's place in Vermont and national history!

UPDATE: The History Center remains closed until further notice, for the safety of our members, staff, and the public.

History Center Acquisition Criteria

Have something to donate to the museum?

It must meet these criteria:

- *Relevance:* Well-documented link to Waterbury history.
- *Non-duplication:* Unique to the collection.
- *Duration:* Intent is to keep or sell (where proceeds will only go to the museum).
- *Title and Provenance:* Clear ownership and history.
- *Restrictions:* Items will not be sold, displayed, or future use.
- *Physical condition:* No evidence of damage or deterioration.
- *Rights:* Transfer of item(s) must include all rights (copyright, etc.).
- *Costs:* Management and care funds should accompany the item.
- *Tax law compliance:* Gifts must comply with tax law.

For more information,

contact the donation process, contact:

info@waterburyhistory.org



Donations Welcome - We are a community organization that deeply appreciates the support and interest of our community. You can donate by check to the PO Box below.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

\$10 per person

\$15 per family (couple and children under 18)

(Membership expirations can be found on your mailing label or in your winter email delivery.)

Please help the Historical Society GO GREEN!

Contact us to opt for email-only delivery. Benefits include cost-saving, paper-saving, and a newsletter in color!



waterburyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
www.waterburyhistoricalsociety.org
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About Us

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PLACE
STAMP
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