WATERBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

New Book Project on Waterbury in the 21st Century Seeks Community Contributors

By Laura Parette and Jane Willard

Two decades into the 21st century, and Waterbury has already seen and experienced a lot.

Before memories recede, the Waterbury Historical Society wants to create a historical record reflecting the community’s life and history since 2000. It has established a New Book Committee and charged it with compiling stories about community members, events, organizations, and businesses that have shaped Waterbury life in the last two decades.

New Book Committee members Laura Parette, Cindy Parks, Steve Van Esen, and Jane Willard invite community members to write the story of these 20 years. How has your organization, business, milestone, or event enhanced life in Waterbury, Vermont?

The final narrative will take several forms. WHS has contracted with The History Press to publish the compilation in book form. In addition, submissions will be archived in PastPerfect, a publicly-accessible database that stores artifacts, documents, photographs, and other historical ephemera. This documentation supports WHS’s commitment to preserving Waterbury history.

The WHS’s New Book Committee is eager to work with the community on this project and we are ready to hear from you. We hope this “sheltering” time will provide you with the time and insight to share your story as we all continue to support and commit to Waterbury as a vital community.

Not a writer but have a story to tell? Share it with us. All submissions will be edited by a professional.

The deadline for story and photo submissions is September 15, 2020. We are excited and inspired with the goal of completing this project by the end of 2021.

Submission specifications can be found on page three.

The History Press, a division of Arcadia Publishing, is easily recognized by its distinctive covers for the "Images of America" and "Postcard History" series. The newest book about Waterbury will be published by The History Press.

The Importance of Local News to Community Life and History

By Cheryl Casey

On March 26, 2020, Waterbury’s newspaper stopped the presses - again. After 13 years, the Vermont Community Newspaper Group suspended publication of the weekly Waterbury Record, citing industry economics. The pandemic simply delivered the final blow.

The first time the Waterbury Record ceased publication was 73 years ago, on October 16, 1947. Owner and editor Milton Sunderland wrote in his final editorial that the lack of experienced help made it impossible to maintain operations. His hope, confessed Sunderland, was that the end of the war would

Continued on page 4

In This Issue

- New Book submission guidelines
- Flag Day celebrations, June 1917
- Waterbury Women exhibit gets video series
- Letters to the Editor
- Memories of Prohibition Waterbury
- Meeting and program updates
- Historic Colbyville
- Airplane crashes in Waterbury
- Special thanks
Flag Day 1917 Parade a Highlight in History of Waterbury Events

By Cheryl Casey

There may be few town-wide events happening these days, but Waterbury is no stranger to putting on showy displays of Town pride and patriotism. One of the largest and arguably most successful took place over 100 years ago, on June 9, 1917.

The celebration was the upcoming Flag Day, nationally established by presidential proclamation only the year before. The backdrop was the Great War raging in Europe, which the U.S. had entered just two months earlier.

An ad in the Waterbury Record placed by event organizers signaled the intended scope of the event: “One thousand automobiles wanted in big patriotic parade and flag raising at Waterbury Saturday afternoon.”

That Saturday, an impressive lineup began its march at 2:30 p.m. The parade route took the participants from the schoolhouse along Stowe, Union, and Main Streets, then around the Village Park. From there it went around the State Hospital grounds before returning to the Park for the formal exercises.

The Waterbury Record made note of the long list of parade participants in an article published the following week, on June 13. Among those present were the Village President and Trustees, a squad of soldiers from Fort Ethan Allen, the 34-piece Montpelier Military Band, Governor Horace Graham, Waterbury’s war veterans, Daughters of the American Revolution, the Ladies of the Maccabees, Waterbury schoolchildren and teachers, and the Knights of the Pythias, which was commended for its elaborate float representing the Roman Senate.

The Scotch Clan Band of Barre, enthused the Record, was “one of the principal features of the Parade and elicited much attention and applause from the thousands of people who thronged the course.”

At the Village Park, Governor Wallace addressed the crowd. Darwin W. Cooley manned a cannon that “boomed forth the national flag salute.” And the prize for the best decorated bicycle in the parade went to Mr. Squier.

According to the Record, some 50 banners proclaimed sentiments common to the time:

| If America don’t suit you, GET OUT |
| You are a Patriot, a Traitor, or a D_____ Fool. No time to be Neutral |
| We won’t let you Starve, Uncle Sam |
| Waterbury has always been on the Map |

The Record also noted that “One of the practical outcomes of the occasion was that many of our young men made inquiries at the Recruiting Tent on the Park.” Everyone seemed to agree that the event was a “successful demonstration of Waterbury’s loyalty to the Flag.”

The headline in the Waterbury Record on June 13, 1917 proclaimed the success of the Flag Day event.
Delayed Waterbury Women Exhibit Given Outlet in Video Series

By Cheryl Casey

One hundred years ago, as the Waterbury community emerged from the grief and horror of the flu pandemic, it witnessed yet another century-defining moment: the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Today, as another pandemic ranges across the country and world, Waterbury Historical Society Museum Curator Jack Carter is determined to honor the suffrage movement and the inspiring women of Waterbury.

The exhibit, “Waterbury Women: Stories & Inspiration,” curated by Carter, was set to open in the Steele Community Room at the Waterbury Municipal Building on March 26. When stay-at-home directives, physical distancing protocols, and the closing of all public buildings put the opening on indefinite hold, Carter started thinking about ways to engage the community with the exhibit.

The result has been a video series that gives

Continued on page 5
Communities Rely on Local Newspapers

Continued from page 1

make a crop of seasoned and aspiring newsmen available for hire. Sadly, he found no such resources.

The Waterbury Record began publishing on April 10, 1895, as Waterbury’s second hometown newspaper. The first, the Free Mountaineer, was established in 1849 and barely made it to the end of the year. In his History of Waterbury, Vermont, 1763-1915, Theodore Graham Lewis remarked on the importance of a community newspaper, which is worth quoting at length:

The establishment of...the Waterbury Record...was an event fraught with greater importance to the town than the mere surface fact might indicate. It is always true of every town that the advent of the town’s own publication, however modest and retiring, is something of grave importance to the community’s life…. It may be said generally, with no ulterior purpose, that the ebb and flow of the fortunes of a town’s newspaper is taken, in large measure, as a gauge of the prosperity of that town. Even the most confirmed cynic will agree that the one thing needful to the intelligent community effort and civic team-work is the local newspaper. Not to recognize this spells an almost fatal indifference to the community’s welfare. (pp. 189-190)

Biddle Duke, who founded the second incarnation of the Waterbury Record in 2007, embraced the significance of a newspaper for a community. He was quoted at the time as saying that “every week the pages will reflect the conversations, letters, thoughts, ideas, and, yes, even complaints of the people who’ve taken the time to contribute to their paper. Because, in the end, weekly papers belong to their communities.”

Local newspapers, however, “remain, by far, the most significant providers of journalism in their communities,” according to 2019 research conducted by the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University. But over the last decade or so, newsrooms have faced deeply slashed budgets, meaning they can employ fewer journalists and editors. Nationally, mergers, acquisitions, and closings have significantly decreased both competition and diversity of coverage. Pulitzer board co-chair Joyce Delhi wrote last year that these developments “greatly diminish[ed] their [newspapers’] capacity to consistently and deeply cover residents’ lives and their political institutions, from school boards to state legislatures. We still see some superb local journalism. But even the best local newspapers struggle to fully and meaningfully

Continued on next page
New Initiative Revives Local News

Continued from previous page

cover their communities on a daily basis — work that, over time, reveals a community and a state to itself and its leaders.”

Local newspapers are also the repository of community life, which can then reveal itself to later generations of residents. For the historian, the newspaper is a primary source revealing not just what happened, but what people thought was happening; how people responded to what was happening; and what people thought about happenings around them. Newspapers are records of what any period, culture, or community deemed significant.

With the Waterbury Record’s demise, some community members are working to fill the sudden news void. At the April 6 Town Select Board Meeting, a representative from the Valley Reporter announced that paper’s intentions to “ramp up coverage of Waterbury news.” However, according to the meeting minutes, “Waterbury news will be covered to the extent there is space in the paper. This will depend on the amount of Valley news and advertisements.”

Waterbury residents Anne Imhoff, Gordon Miller, and Lisa Scaglotti have established a Waterbury-centered plan: an online (for now) newspaper, the Waterbury Roundabout (waterburyroundabout.org). Currently a volunteer news organization, the Roundabout posts stories written by Imhoff and Scaglotti -- both of whom have extensive journalism and publishing experience -- as well as contributions from UVM student journalists and local freelance writers. Miller, whose professional news photography has been capturing community life for well over a decade, is the outlet’s principal photographer. Julia Bailey-Wells, a senior at UVM, built and maintains the website. The Valley Reporter is a partner in this endeavor, agreeing to share content on their website.

If contributing to a new book about Waterbury in the 21st century, Theodore Graham Lewis would certainly insist, as he once did about the Waterbury Record, that the establishment of the Waterbury Roundabout is “an event fraught with greater importance to the town than the mere surface fact might indicate…the advent of the town’s own publication, however modest and retiring, is something of grave importance to the community’s life.”

Waterbury Women Exhibit Waits to Open

Continued from page 3

viewers highlights in the lives of each of the 20 women featured in the exhibit. Three episodes have been posted to the Historical Society’s YouTube and Facebook pages, with three more in production. Carter’s hope is that the videos will generate interest in the exhibit for when people are again permitted to visit the Municipal Building. “There is more to each woman, live, at the exhibit,” Carter said.

“The videos enhance the exhibit…once we can get in to see it! They tell a slightly different story of each of the Waterbury Women and that makes it interesting,” said Laura Parette, who helped Carter with the exhibit and is also one of the featured women.

Carter’s idea for the exhibit stemmed from his desire to commemorate the ratification of the 19th Amendment in some way. “I didn’t have much information on Waterbury women who were suffragettes,” he explained, but he did remember a 2007 library scrapbook project that celebrated Waterbury women. This scrapbook became the basis for the exhibit. “I thought it was a good way to highlight women that people know or knew in town in the last hundred years,” said Carter.

For the original 2007 scrapbook project, family and community members contributed pages, filling the book with the stories of 35 Waterbury women. Carter then “picked out twenty whose stories interested me the most” for the 2020 exhibit.

Once the exhibit opens to the public, visitors will be able to see the original scrapbook with all 35 women featured. They can also take a blank page and write a story for a new scrapbook edition of inspirational Waterbury women.

Editor’s note: A version of this story appeared in the Waterbury Roundabout on May 28, 2020.

According to the Waterbury Record, some 500 students marched in the 1917 Flag Day parade. Here, the students can be seen marching down Stowe Street after passing along Main Street.
Letters to the Editor

To the Editor,

The photo terrain of the MMER shelter indicates that it would be in Moscow, not the Center or in Colbyville. When my father was peddling meat in the Moscow area, he would, on occasion, take me with him as a passenger. I recall crossing the rails from Rt 100 into Moscow’s small farms and the stunning, close-up view of Vermont’s highest mountain where I would become a downhill skier on the famous Nosedive Trail.

Your Waterbury Women exhibit recalls the 1930 Waterbury Center Ladies Aid Society. One of their projects was to educate their husbands about the disgusting vulgarity of their spitting habits. My neighbor Jesse Hayes was their President.

Your Connecticut Member Calvin Dow

To the Editor,

June 10th marks the 105th anniversary of the passing of Dr. Henry Janes. As most Waterbury-ites know, Dr. Janes was a man of impeccable character who served his country in war and his community in peace. His generous spirit was known when he was alive and has been ever since, with his estate donation that now houses the public library, municipal offices, and history center.

For many years I have been to Dr. and Mrs. Janes’ monument in Hope Cemetery in Waterbury. It is also the final resting place of William Pitt Butler, a relative of Dr. Janes. I have often thought the lot and monument needed to be made more attractive with landscaping. Those who have seen it know that a large, handsome granite monument alone marks the corner lot, without any embellishment of plantings.

With permission from the Cemetery Commission, I am planning to change the appearance of the lot by adding some evergreens, flowering shrubs and other vegetation. I have contracted Evergreen Gardens to make this happen.

I hope you will agree this will be a tribute to Henry and Frances Janes. Their contributions to our town were immeasurable. The landscaping of their lot and monument will be a reminder that we still care about them 105 years later.

If anyone would like to make a donation toward this effort, please contact me at (802)-244-7409 or email – empstowest@aol.com.

Thank you,
Jack Carter

Meeting and Program Updates

From the Board

At the most recent meeting of the Waterbury Historical Society Board, on Friday, May 29:

- The Board addressed the delay in voting on this year’s slate of officers. A motion was unanimously passed for the Society to continue operating with the current Board and staff members until the next available meeting date, at which time the Annual Meeting business will be conducted prior to the scheduled program.

- The Board unanimously agreed to cancel the summer potluck picnic and program for this year, given the limitation on gathering sizes and physical distancing requirements. The next meeting and program is tentatively scheduled for October.

- The Board thanked outgoing Program Committee members Cheryl Casey, Anne Imhoff, and Cami Luce. They also welcomed Skip Flanders to the Committee.

The Janes plot in Hope Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Jack Carter.
Rural Brewing in Prohibition-Era Waterbury

By Calvin Dow

Many people resorted to making their own alcoholic beverages (wine and beer) within the privacy of their own residence. My father liked a beer he referred to as “home brew.” The cool dirt floor cellar of our rural, small-town Vermont farm was a perfect place to make his beer.

Dad had two 55-gallon barrels constructed with wooden staves that were held in place with moveable steel bands. Stand a barrel on one end, then loosen enough of the bands to allow removal of the round end piece to which the spigot was attached.

A heavy cloth sack containing barley seeds was put in the open barrel. Brewing hops and brown sugar (or molasses) were added. Next the barrel end was put in place and the securing bands tightened by moving them with a hammer and a piece of heavy flat metal.

Now the watertight barrel with contents was put horizontally on a wooden cradle. The right amount of water would be added through a bung-hole in the top middle of the barrel and a plug would be placed in the hole (loosely, to allow venting). I don’t know how long it took for the mixture to ferment to the point of becoming drinkable. At some point in time Dad would start the second barrel brewing so when the first barrel was empty the second was ready for drinking.

This may appear to be a lot of imbibing, but Dad’s little brewery attracted some bar flies. His two brothers, Leslie and George, would come in and help themselves whether Dad was home or not. After local Sunday baseball games Dad and his buddies would sit on boxes beside the barrels and rehash the ball game while quaffing the cool refreshing beer.

A humorous incident related to this activity occurred one time when Dad disposed of the saturated barley from an emptied barrel by mixing it in with the other mash he fed to our pigs. Fifteen minutes or so after the pigs gobbled down their food, they started snorting and racing wildly around their yard as they reacted drunkenly from the effects of the alcohol. It was a riot!

Above: Earl Dow, the author’s father, fishing in Waterbury Center in 1937.
Right: Earl Dow with his meat wagon. Mr. Dow peddled meat and owned the Center Market in Waterbury Center.
(Photos courtesy of Calvin Dow.)
The Colbyville Historic District is typical of the small, 19th-century Vermont Company town. It provides insight into how settlement developed and was supported by a local industry, and still maintains its mill dams and falls, among the most picturesque in the county. The area derives its name solely from the industrial enterprises of George J. Colby.

The village district consists of a progression of 19th-century houses on both sides of Route 100, a market and a gas station, and the Full Gospel Church. This church was built in 1895 as the Early Advent Christian Church of Colbyville. The bell tower was added around 1921. It also includes the upper and lower falls of Thatcher Brook.

Oliver Rod and Enoch Bean are credited with building the first mills on the falls; Bean, a wool-carding mill on the lower falls and Rood, a potato-whiskey distillery on the upper falls, both around 1800. E. P. Butler and Erastus Parker later used Rood’s mill to make starch from potatoes. Butler built a sawmill on the upper falls, later used as a tannery until it burned.

In 1856, George J. Colby (aged 23) and Edwin A. Colby (age 21) came from Bolton and purchased a shop and 30 acres from Parker that included several acres of willows. They began peeling willows in 1857 and manufactured willow-ware and willow-peeling machines invented by George Colby. In 1858 they employed Anton Landt, a “first-class” German willow-worker, to begin making children’s “cabs” or buggies. They soon began producing the wheels for the cabs themselves.

In 1860 they patented and began manufacturing an iron-framed clothes wringer said by early sources to be the first to find wide distribution. They employed two thirds of workers to produce 100 wringers per day, as the firm “Howden, Colby and Company.” In 1865 they became known as “Colby Brotherhood Company.” By 1871 they owned a total of fifteen buildings with 40,000 square feet of space including a “machine shop, blacksmith shop, iron house and shed, sawmill, lumber sheds, steam house, mill yard dwelling house, wringer house, horse barn, double tenement house, basket or willow house, toll gate, paint shop, storehouse, and ½ acre of land in Mill Village.” They employed from 60-100 men at this time. They purchased or built a dozen dwellings including the Colby Mansion by “George J. Colby, Architect.”

The Colby’s were involved in a variety of pursuits. They ran a job-printing establishment and sold small steam engines. George Colby wrote pamphlets; one supporting “Greenback” politics and another entitled “How to Make Money.” In the early 1870’s the Colby brothers went bankrupt in a suit over wringer patents. In 1872 they sold out to the “Colby Wringer Company” which was sold to the “Montpelier Manufacturing Company” in 1873. The “Colby Wringer Company” continued manufacturing until 1886 when the “Colbyville Manufacturing Company” was organized to produce “French’s Improved Octagon Butter Tubs” as well as “Colby’s Little Washer” and extension washbenches.

Subsequently the upper sawmill property became the L. J. Roberts sawmill and the lower property was used to produce “Patent Butter Boxes” patent 1890 by a succession of owners. Stedman C. Wheeler bought both properties (in 1894 and in 1905) and ran a lumber and clapboard mill. Lumber used in the Vermont State Hospital and in the Mt. Mansfield Electric Railway trestle at Waterbury Center originated here. The power at the upper mill was generated by two wheels and the lower by one wheel. The wooden dams were replaced by stone, later faced with concrete.

Both of the dams remain as well as the metal penstock and portion of the stone turbine pit at the lower dam. The dams as well as the natural rock formations at the lower falls are a picturesque asset to Colbyville.

Most of the dwellings of the Colbys and other important figures of Colbyville’s industrial past still exist in the village. “Bissette’s Market” includes the home of Anton Landt who was also the legal town agent for the sale of liquor. In addition to the George J. Colby house, those of Jesse Colby, Stedman Wheeler and Dillingham (President of Colbyville Manufacturing Company) are still extant.

[EDITORS’S NOTE: Remember that this description is a reprint of a survey written in 1976 – much has changed since then.]
Top Left: The Colby Mansion, shortly after its construction c.1870 by George J. Colby. (Photo courtesy of nps.gov) Top Right: Students and teacher standing in front of the Colbyville School. The Colby Brothers Co. buildings can be seen in the background off to the left. Today, the site is occupied by the Billings Mobile gas station. Bottom: Segment from a F.W. Beers & Co. 1873 map of Washington County, showing the Colbyville district.

THE WATERBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THANKS

Karen Steele

FOR HER CONTINUED GENEROUS SUPPORT
Airplane Crashes in Waterbury

By Brian Lindner

Yes…..there have been a few. Luckily, they have all been rather minor and some weren’t even really "crashes."

It is probably safe to say that most current Waterbury residents have no idea we once had our own official airport. It was the result of efforts of several business leaders in the community that included men like Bill Mason, Bill Collins, and Dr. Robert Kennedy. The airport was located near 3079 Waterbury-Stowe Road where today’s glass blowing studio is located.

We are fortunate that two official crash files still exist for these crashes. In 1982 the Vermont Agency of Transportation purposely destroyed the bulk of all investigation files for aircraft crashes going back to the beginning of flight in Vermont. Luckily, a few of the files were saved (literally) at the last minute and are now housed at the University of Vermont.

The first known accident involved an incomplete airplane being built to take off and land on water. Rodney Hood of Wolcott worked at Eldredge’s Garage in Waterbury and had completed his “home built” airplane to the point where he wanted to test it on water. No wings had yet been attached but the floats were on and the engine installed. It was time to test its seaworthiness.

On Sunday, July 26, 1931 he floated the plane on the Winooski River at the south end of town. As Hood taxied it about 500’ upstream, Dean Johnson stood on one float outside the cockpit. When Hood began a turn and came broadside to the current, the plane quickly flipped over. Johnson was struck on the head but came to when he hit the cool water. Hood climbed out and immediately declared the next test would be on Lake Champlain. No further records have been located to determine if he was ever successful.

In 1947 everyone in Waterbury knew an airport was being built on the road to Stowe. It was on June 22nd when Bernard Bordeaux decided to land at the new airport (before it was officially opened) and came in for a landing. He had seen Raymond Belleville on the ground signaling him to NOT land but Bordeaux mistakenly took it instead as an invitation to land. It seems grading operations were still going on and the dirt surface had not yet been fully compacted. Bordeaux’s plane had almost stopped when one wheel hit a soft spot and the plane flipped over. Bordeaux was not injured but the plane was significantly damaged.

Almost exactly ten years later July 05, 1957 Forest Webster flew around the airport to do a visual inspection and saw nothing of concern. He came in from the north where the pilot’s view of the runway was partially blocked by a stand of softwood trees. (The trees are still there in 2018.) Webster didn’t realize that behind the trees the land stepped up about four feet to the level of the actual runway. As a result, the plane came in about four feet too low and hit the edge of the threshold snapping the landing gear, bending the propeller and throwing Webster and his passenger violently forward giving them bloody faces but no other significant injuries.

The last accident at the airport was on August 26, 1960 when Manuel Renasco was landing. Like so many others before him, he skimmed over the top of those pesky softwoods before touching down. He landed too far down the field travelling toward the Sayah Farm. When Renasco thought he would shoot off the end of the runway, with his daughter on board, he attempted a ground loop. The maneuver failed when the plane flipped over and one wing became impaled on a fence post. Rensaco and his daughter received bumps and bruises.

The last incident was not a crash – it was a great emergency landing. On April 10, 2005 Robert Buck and his son were flying over Waterbury Center when their engine suffered a complete failure. Buck was a professional airline pilot and routinely in the habit of watching for places he could make an emergency landing. With no power, he made a perfect landing in a field off Kneeland Flats and they both walked away unharmed.

If readers have further details or photographs of these incidents, please contact the author at 802-279-1450.
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 is closed until further notice due to novel coronavirus precautions.

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**History Center Acquisition Criteria**

Have something to donate to the museum? See if your item(s) meet these criteria:

- **Relevance:** Well-documented link to the town of Waterbury.
- **Non-duplication:** Unique to the existing holdings of the collection.
- **Duration:** Intent is to officially add the item to the collection for the WHS to keep or sell (where proceeds will only go to benefit the Society).
- **Title and Provenance:** Deed of gift or bill of sale should accompany all items.
- **Restrictions:** Items will not be held by the donor to criteria about use, display, or future disposition.
- **Physical condition:** No extensive conservation required.
- **Rights:** Transfer of item(s) includes all pertinent rights (literary, property, copyright, etc.).
- **Costs:** Management and care of item(s) should be financially viable for the Society, or dedicated funds should accompany the donation of the item(s).
- **Tax law compliance:** Gifts must be in compliance with applicable tax law.

*For more information or to begin the donation process, contact: archivistwhs@gmail.com*
Donations Welcome - We are a community organization that deeply appreciates the support and interest of our community. You can donate online at our website below.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

$10 per person
$15 per family (couple and children under 18)

(Check the mailing label on your newsletter to see when your membership expires.)

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