

# Windham Historical Society, Quarterly Review

Spring 2023

## Springing Into Action

With the first signs of spring, the team at the Windham Historical Society jumped right in to ensure an action-packed year full of fun and activities.

By Haley Pal

Our first program in March, featuring Patrick Bonsant who showed the film, *The Gunpowder Mills of Gorham and Windham Maine*, was a tremendous success. The Little Meetinghouse had a capacity crowd and the donations for the program were very generous.

In May, we offered another well-received and well-attended program where Maine Historic Preservation archaeologists John Mosher and Dr. Leith Smith gave a talk about the archaeological dig that took place on River Road from 2015 to 2020. The fascinating slide-based lecture focused on architectural features of the fort and some of the artifacts found during the excavation. An overview of frontier life in the 18th century was also discussed.

Most recently, meteorologist Sarah Long paid us a visit at the Little Meetinghouse on a Saturday afternoon in June to talk about the weather and life at the summit of Mount Washington. She also discussed a trip she took to the Antarctica Peninsula last winter. There was another wonderful audience in attendance who enjoyed meeting Sarah and seeing her incredible photos of her "trip of a lifetime."

On another front, Education Liaison Walter Lunt coordinated with a group of homeschoolers to provide a mini-history tour of the Village Green in May. The students visited the Old Grocery and learned about a mercantile of the late 19th/early 20th century. They visited the one-room schoolhouse where schoolmarm Miss Goold (aka Paula Sparks) taught an abbreviated class. Then they headed to the hearse house where Susan Simonson and Walter Lunt talked about the historic vehicle inside. A fun activity was stopping by the Blacksmith Shop to see our resident Village smithy Sam Simonson at his trade. Sam crafted hooks for each family to take home with them as a keepsake of the day. The students were engaged and full of questions throughout the tour. It was a fun afternoon for both the kids and docents alike.

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**Top:** Paula Sparks teaching class to the homeschoolers  
**Middle:** Schoolmarm Miss Goold (aka Paula Sparks) greeting children at The Village School  
**Bottom:** Village Smithy Sam Simonson showing off his trade

**B**ut it isn't all fun and games around the Green. Our building stewards have been very active in getting their buildings ready for the upcoming summer and fall events we have planned. The Old Grocery was brought out of mothballs (and dryer sheets to keep away the mice) and dusted and put back together after a long winter's nap. Steward Linda Lunt has just a few minor repairs and painting on the exterior of the building in order to finish her projects by the end of the summer.



Building Steward Linda Lunt with students in the Old Grocery discussing a display



Walter Lunt showing students the old Town Hearse

At the schoolhouse, Steward Paula Sparks has a few goals she'd like to accomplish. The biggest is to remove the chimney on the exterior of the building since it really has no purpose at this time. Some windows need putty and repainting, and some siding needs to be patched. The last major project is to finish adding bead board to the ceiling in the cloakroom of the building.

Susan and Sam Simonson have been busy with their buildings as well. Sam has set up an anvil at the Blacksmith Shop and he used it when the homeschool kids came for their visit. Susan is busy trying to process the scope of the significant work that is needed to be done at the Old Town House Museum. There will be more about this in upcoming newsletters as we have more details to share.

Carol Manchester, Steward for the South Windham Library, is hard at work preparing the little yellow building for its Grand Opening on August 26. The biggest issue has been the floor, but Carol, Susan, and Sam Simonson have been resolving that problem. Several hours were spent scraping the semi-hardened carpet glue from the floor and steaming attempts were made. Then the floor was sanded and now just a finishing coat of varnish needs to be applied. Some electrical work, minor carpentry, interior finish painting, wall cleaning, and display set-up are the next steps and this building will be ready to open to the public.

The South Windham Library Steward Karen Lougee has discovered the building may be in more need of repair than was originally thought. She is waiting for a Structural Engineer's report regarding the reinforcement of the roof, repair of the roof structure and the cross tie-rod in the interior of the building. The report will determine how much we can get done on the structure this year and whether or not the building will open this summer.

*As you can see, there is a lot of work being done on the Green. It's all happening with a small group of volunteers. We could really use more members who will step up and lend a hand. If you would like to be a part of bringing the Village Green to life, contact any of the Society members listed on this page. It's time to start springing into action, so volunteer today!*

### WINDHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT

The goal of the Windham Historical Society is to foster interest in the history of the town by presenting relevant programs, providing educational opportunities, and maintaining historical facilities where displays of the town's past are available.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

### HELLO MEMBERS!

I just love this time of year! Everything is fresh and new, it's like starting with a clean plate!

Plans and projects for the Historical Society and Village Green are already in the works. A wonderful group of students from Windham Schools, along with their parents, kicked off their annual community service projects on April 22nd from the Windham Historical Society grounds this year! Six or seven students/adults stayed at the Society and raked, trimmed, weeded, and planted flowers in the window boxes while the rest went out into the community to assist others. A big

**THANK YOU** to Powerserve — we look so nice and are ready for the season!

As the responsibilities and number of open buildings grow at the Society, we do need to increase our number of volunteers and memberships. If you are interested or know someone who would like to be a part of this great organization, please contact me at 671-8428 or [ssimons1@maine.rr.com](mailto:ssimons1@maine.rr.com). Some of the areas we have identified for assistance are Docents, Setting up Exhibits, Publicity, and Records Documentation, Setting up and Volunteering at Bake Sales, at the August Open House, Programs, and the Fall Festival, to name a few. Some of this work can be done from home with flexibility.



Some Powerserve volunteers on the porch of the Old Grocery

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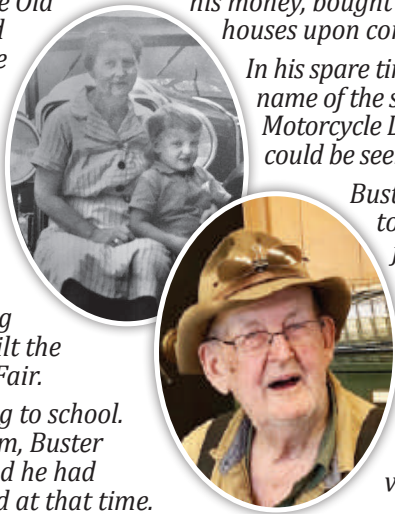


## Meet Buster Gilman By Haley Pal

*If you've been following the Society on Facebook this year, you are very familiar with 4-year-old Buster Gilman. We've been reading his mother's diary from the year 1937 and hardly a day goes by when Alice Gilman doesn't mention her young son and the tremendous amount of time he played in the great outdoors.*

*Well, all that time outside must have done something right because this year, Buster Gilman turned 90 years old. He has been a member of the Windham Historical Society for many of those years and he has done several projects for us. Buster is responsible for making the signs in front of the Old Town House Museum on Windham Center Road and on the side of the Society property on Route 202. Our reference library in the Old Town House Museum has many shelves housing our collections that were built by Buster. He made the window boxes that grace the Old Grocery and the South Windham Library on the Green. He also painted the library's steps. In addition, Buster trimmed and cut down trees on the Society property to clear space, he added a handrail to the dangerous steps leading up to the Old Town House attic, and he even built the Christmas tree sign we used for our Christmas Fair.*

*Not one for regiment, Buster did not enjoy going to school. When his father thought he was in the classroom, Buster would be out riding his sister's horse. He decided he had enough in the 8th grade and left school for good at that time.*



**Top:** Buster and his mother Alice, whose diary we are following this year on Facebook **Bottom:** Buster at a recent visit to the Society

*The lack of further education did not affect him adversely, however. He began his working life haying for Archie Laffen on his Windham farm. Then he worked in the woods lumbering for a while. He was employed for a time by the Town of Windham where he did road work. Later, he became a machinist at Sylvania and remained there for 23 years. He would be told the kind of machine that was needed for a specific purpose and Buster would set out to design it. He proved to excel at it.*

*Always good with his hands, Buster built his two homes by himself. He never took out a loan to build either one. He saved his money, bought the supplies he needed, and paid for the houses upon completion.*

*In his spare time, Buster took joy in riding motorcycles. The name of the street where he built his second home was Motorcycle Drive and he was the man who named it. He could be seen riding his bikes around town well into his 80s.*

*Buster has been married seven times in his search to find Mrs. Right. He says he "just couldn't find a woman who wasn't ugly." He had five children. His two sons have passed away, but he still has three living daughters. He has lived in Windham most of his life and now resides on Swett Road where he still enjoys outside time working around the property. He pops in to visit us at the Society every now and then, too, and we all enjoy our visits with Buster.*

## Help Rebuild the Gambo Gunpowder Mills By Haley Pal

Gorham resident Don Wescott is in the process of creating a realistic picture of Windham's past. He is working on a diorama of the Gambo Gunpowder Mills that were an important part of our town's history. In their heyday in the 19th century, many Windham residents were employed here. During the Civil War, more than 25 percent of the gunpowder used by the Union forces was manufactured at this facility. Sadly, not much remains of this once bustling part of our community.

Don has been working on the diorama which is a mini replica of the mills in their glory days for quite some time. He could use some help to bring the project to completion. He is looking for individuals who could provide one or two half days a week working with him. Some work can be done on site, but some can be taken home to finish up. Scenery painting of the area that surrounded the mills and assembling small structures from kits or from scratch needs to be done. Also, many, many trees need to be created to finish off the scene.

Don has been working on the project at the Windham Middle School, but soon the diorama will move to the South Windham Library on the Village Green where it will be used as a permanent display. If you would like to help putting together a miniature piece of history, contact Don at [dwescot2@maine.rr.com](mailto:dwescot2@maine.rr.com).



*History Club students viewing the diorama being put together by Don Wescott*

*(President's Letter con't)*

On a more serious note, the Society has a few building structural issues facing us. One of them is with the Windham Center Library, which as of this writing has been identified and a plan is in place. The other is much larger, though! The main brick building, built in 1833, is showing signs of weakness in the floor joists. The joists are the original logs which moisture, mold, and rot have set in over the years. This will be a major project for the organization, at significant cost. This building is not only of great importance to the Society, but also to the town! It served as the Town Hall for almost 150 years, and had several other functions including being used as a school, high school, for basketball games, and as a food pantry! It is very important that the health and integrity of the building is preserved. We are obtaining information on the scope of the project. As more details become available, you will be updated.

I look forward to seeing you at our many functions this year!

**Susan Simonson**, *President, Windham Historical Society*

We hope you'll be able to join Society members Haley Pal and Paula Sparks at the Windham Historical Society's booth at **this year's Summerfest taking place on June 24**. Our booth's focus will be on the Village Green. We'll introduce visitors to the Green via a diorama being custom-made by Paula. There will be a trivia contest where people who guess answers correctly will receive a homemade cookie and possibly a small Historical Society souvenir. We'll feature some of the books available in our store and have handouts about the Green to encourage people to consider helping us on upcoming projects. It should be a fun day of community spirit in action, so come on down and say hello.



## Junior History Club Happenings

By Paula Sparks

**I**t has been a busy year. It began with the Club returning to some Windham mapping projects... not one of their favorite activities! Walter Lunt gave a talk about the names of different areas in town and where they originated. Their favorite... Tattievile! The following week making ice cream and learning a bit about its history was a well-deserved map break.

As the story of antique doll "Hitty" continued, we found her aboard a whaling ship. Learning about the whaling trade, we discovered that sailors might have brought home Sailors Valentines most likely purchased in the Caribbean to give as keepsakes to their loved ones. We had great success making our own beautiful versions.

Guest speaker Vana Carmona shared information she has learned about slavery in Maine after discovering that some of her Maine ancestors owned slaves. Also, local metal detector Al Farris shared some examples of treasures he has found here in Windham with us.

You can't talk about sailors without discussing pirates and their treasure chests. The Junior Historians discovered the difference between pirates and privateers, or legal pirates, and wreckers. We decorated our own treasure chests and then club members followed clues to find pirate items to fill the treasure chests they designed.



Working on treasure chests

We also learned that sailors enjoyed the craft of scrimshaw. Minus whale bones or shark teeth, we substituted baked fimo clay to create our "bones" and used India ink and simple carving tools, sandpaper and paste wax to create our very own scrimshaw replicas.

The year wrapped up with several field trips. Our trip to the Bath Maritime Museum was a special one where we spent time participating in craft activities, looking at exhibits and watching demonstrations. The day was finished off with a stop for giant ice cream cones.

We also visited the diorama of Gambo Mills being created by Don Wescott and the kids were fascinated about the history of the mills. Don is looking for volunteers to help him finish the project.

We also did a metal detecting day with Al Farris and paid a trip to the Village Green. We ended the year with a last day party complete with special treats, trivia games, and prizes.

*Where has the time gone?*

*This fourth year of History Club has been wonderful and we had so much fun with history. We are sad to see it come to an end, but look forward to the history adventures awaiting us when we come back to school in the fall!*



The Sailors Valentines created by History Club members




Club members making ice cream



# OPEN HOUSE

AUGUST 26 • 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.



This history-packed event will include tours of the historic Old Grocery Museum that's been transformed into a mercantile of yesteryear and our authentic one-room schoolhouse. The South Windham Library will be open for the first time and will feature exhibits about South Windham history and the railroad that was once an important part of South Windham Village. In addition, our Blacksmith Sam Simonson will be showing off his craft at the Blacksmith Shop.

There will be a concert in the Gazebo at Noon featuring Maine folksinger Katherine Rhoda who will play a variety of musical instruments including the Marxophone, violin-guitar, hammered dulcimer, the accordion, and more. You're encouraged to bring some chairs and pack a picnic lunch that you can enjoy while you watch the show. Baked goods will be on sale for dessert. Beverages will also be available.

The film *The Gunpowder Mills of Gorham and Windham Maine* will be presented by Patrick Bonsant during the course of the day in case you missed our March program.

*The Open House is an event that will delight the whole family, so be sure to invite your kids, grandkids, parents, friends, and neighbors. Join the Windham Historical Society as we show you how to have fun with history!*

# FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL

OCTOBER 7 • 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.




In the fall, when the apples are crisp and so is the air, the Society is hosting our first annual Harvest Festival. This fun-filled day will feature live entertainment in the Village Green Gazebo as well as activities for both kids and adults to give a try. There will be a pie-eating contest for the kids and possibly a carved pumpkin competition. Society members will be on hand cooking up burgers and hotdogs for sale. The ladies will be offering our legendary baked goods and assorted other goodies as well.



In addition, the Fall Harvest Festival will provide visitors with an opportunity to gift shop for treasures at a Craft Fair on the Village Green. Various vendors will display their wares in booths on the Green and in the historic buildings, crafted seasonal holiday gifts will be sold. The Harvest Festival is a perfect way to enjoy an Autumn day while you step back in time and visit the Windham of days gone by!

*Would you like to participate?  
Would you like to host a building or activity?  
Would you like to be a singing minstrel at the fair?  
Or show your crafts as a vendor?*

*If so, please call and leave a message at (207) 892-1433 or email any of us listed on page 2 of this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!*



## CONDOLENCES

By Carol Manchester

*It is with sincere sympathy that we acknowledge the passing of three Windham Historical Society members.*

Following her courageous battle with illness, **Lucille Woodis**, 78, died on April 13. She grew up in Windham and attended Windham schools, but following graduation she settled in Florida, studied at St. Peter's Junior College, and during the course of her working years was employed by the Veterans Administration and a Florida food market. Real Estate was her true passion, however. In later years, she returned to Windham, took up activities like walking, snowshoeing, and kayaking, and she became a life member of the Windham Historical Society as well as a hospice volunteer. Her many friends described her as a kind and loving soul.

A testament to the town's great respect and admiration for **George Hall**, founder of Hall Implement Co. who passed away on May 4 at age 85, was evidenced on Saturday, May 20, at the Hall family business as friends, associates, and community members came to celebrate his life. Tractors lined the outside of the property, while inside, visitors shared stories and condolences with family members and each other. George was one of Windham's most well-known businessmen and was recognized by the community

with a number of plaques and awards for his service and contributions. George will be missed by the Windham community. He was a very special man.

It was learned in April that Society member **Clinton L. Smith** passed away recently. Smith, 82, has resided in Florida for many years, but several of his childhood friends remember him as tinkering or working on mechanical things. Their memories included seeing him riding his "Whizzer," a motorized bicycle especially popular during WWII, up and down a dirt driveway off Route 302. Clint Smith graduated from Windham High School in 1958 and during his high school years, swimming, science club, and working on the junior prom were among his activities. Afterward he worked with his father, Lawrence "Smitty" Smith in businesses related to dams, power plants, and generator stations.

*The Windham Historical Society extends its deepest sympathy to the many family members and friends of "Lou" Woodis, George Hall, and Clinton Smith.*

# Windham Then & Now

## Hall Implement Company

By Haley Pal

Hall Implement Company at the Route 302/202 Rotary is an iconic image in our town. It has been overlooking the traffic circle since 1961 when George Hall purchased his John Deere franchise at the age of 23. The company began with a staff of three and has grown to a staff of 17 today that includes George's two sons Steve and Don and his grandson Derek.

"First and foremost, it's a family business," said Steve. But the Halls are not the only family at Hall Implement. Their employees are treated well and some have remained on the job at Hall Implement for their entire working career. One current employee will be celebrating his 40th anniversary with the company this year.

George Hall built a loyal clientele in his over 60 years of doing business in Windham by treating his customers in a manner in which he himself would want to be treated. That philosophy of kindness and respect have been the secret to the business' success.

The company began selling primarily farm equipment, but has evolved over the decades. Now, everyday gardeners and homeowners can come to Hall Implement to get quality products purchased from people with the know-how to give them just what they need to meet their individual demands. They service what they sell and believe in the products they offer.

George was a strong believer in the Windham community. Over the years, he showed his support in a number of ways, backing organizations from the Windham Historical Society to local sports teams, to schools and community groups. His sons plan on following in his footsteps. George Hall passed away in May at the age of 85. His legacy will live on through his family, employees and countless customers who have always gotten a fair deal when purchasing that green and yellow equipment that so many have come to rely on for the upkeep of their homes.

### SOCIETY MEMBERS REMEMBER GEORGE HALL

***"George Hall was an important local businessman who quietly helped many local schools, clubs, organizations, students, and Windham residents over the years. He was a quiet benefactor who did not want or need publicity. Everyone knew George Hall, but not many knew the impact he made on Windham. I am so glad I knew him."***

—Linda Griffin, former President, Windham Historical Society

***"George Hall was probably one of the nicest people I have ever met."***

—Jim Hanscom, former Vice President, Windham Historical Society

***"George Hall was a Windham icon. He was dedicated to his family and appreciative of his customers and his town. I have known him for over 50 years and admired his interest and devotion to the Historical Society and appreciated the access he gave me to original documents and newspaper clippings about his family and town. With his passing, Windham mourns one of its best."***

—Walter Lunt, Education Liaison, Windham Historical Society

***"He was one of the most generous people I have ever known. He was a major supporter of the Cumberland County Fair, the Windham Historical Society, Windham Neighbors Helping Neighbors, the Sebago Lakes Region Chamber of Commerce, local parades, and planting flowers at Foster's Corner. And that's just naming a few."***

—Gary Plummer, Windham Historical Society member

***"George and Phyllis Hall's support and generosity to the Windham Historical Society have enabled us to realize so many dreams. In addition to monetary donations, the Halls donated a lawn tractor to the Society several years ago and provide in-kind annual support in its servicing. It's been very helpful in maintaining our grounds and the Village Green. The Society sends its sincere condolences to the Hall family. George will be missed by all."***

—Susan Simonson, Windham Historical Society President

For George Hall's complete obituary, please see the May 12 issue of the *Portland Press Herald*, the May 18 issue of *The Windham Eagle*, or "It Happened in Windham," in the *Lakes Region Weekly* of May 19.



George Hall in front of Hall Implement Co. in 1987



Hall Implement Co. today



## Curator's Corner

By Penny Loura

- **Ceil Clark** has given the Society some interesting Windham memorabilia that was compiled over the years by **Ruth Jorgensen**. The collection includes Elementary School Reports from the years 1940 and 1941, report cards from Windham High School and senior photos of some students from the high school class of 1949. Other items of interest are some of Ruth's old school papers and her wedding announcement to Keith Clark.
- We have acquired a collection of 17 hand-forged nails found in the **Legrow** house which was built prior to the Revolutionary War near Baker's Corner on Route 302. These were found when cleaning the Windham Center Library.
- **Susan Harrison** donated three old postcards from North Windham. One was of the west shore of Little Sebago, another one of the shore line/beach on Little Sebago, and one of Boody's Store.
- A handheld "Horlick's" beater and a metal pot scrubber were donated by **Patty Buck**. They are both on display at the Old Grocery.
- **Linda Lunt** has given the Society an antique triple photo frame from 1888 that is now at the Old Grocery.
- **Daniel Pride** provided a published article about the Pride Family complete with a history dating back to the 1600s.
- Two small Sears Roebuck catalogs from 1900 and 1923, a vintage sampler made by Annie Morrill and one made by Bertha Cannell were given to the Society by **Jeanette Cummings**. They are now located in the Old Grocery.



The Horlick's "beater"



Old Sears and Roebuck's catalogs

## Membership Corner

By Carol Manchester

Windham Historical Society greets **Doris Meehan** of Windham and **Judi Gardner** of Kittery as two of its newest life members. In appreciation for his excellent March program about the Gambo Gunpowder Mills, the Society has also given **Patrick Bonsant** a one-year complimentary membership. Society members bid you all a heartfelt welcome and look forward to meeting you at some of the upcoming events this summer and fall.

## Donations

By Karen Lougee

**Jim McBride** and **Nancy Beaupre** made donations to the General Fund.

## Queries

By Penny Loura

- **Richard Mayberry** was looking for genealogical information about the **Mayberry** family. I sent him what I had.
- **Wilson Callan** is researching **Josiah Baker** and needs vital records for his GAR. I sent him numerous pages of Baker and Baker-related information. He plans to pick it up in July.
- **Joanne Thomes Bicknell** is looking for information on the **Thomes Grocery Store**. I was able to locate the store, but found no pictures. The store was owned by **Herbert and Margaret Thomes** between the years of 1936 and 1962. If anyone has pictures they would be willing to share, I will make sure Joanne gets them.
- **Kayla Graffam** is interested in viewing the cane belonging to Oliver Lowell given to us by Margery Dean. I sent her a photo and told her she is welcome to visit.
- **Barbara Sawhill** is interested in the history of Sebago Lake and the great freshet occurring in the 1800s. I referred her to one of our members and his earlier presentation, but none of this information has been saved. She may pay us a visit.
- **Dave Smith** wants to know if we are interested in a manuscript which includes **Elijah Pope**. I told him indeed we would be. He will visit sometime soon.
- **Muriel Jackson** is looking for a source of a marriage record of **John Rogers and Abiah F. Osgood**. I did locate Abiah in the Windham Hill United Church of Christ record book. "Mrs. Abiah Rogers admitted on January 6, 1839." She remained a member of the church until her death. I could find no mention of John Rogers in the same church, nor was I able to locate him in our Quaker records. She also inquired about the parents of **Ann Mayberry**. I did find Ann Mayberry born to Daniel Mayberry and Betsey Nash.
- **Liz Pretorius** is hoping to find information on **Augustus Reed**. I am currently searching.

### I Want to Join!

Fill out the form below and write a check made payable to the Windham Historical Society. Mail to:  
Windham Historical Society, PO Box 1475, Windham, ME 04062

Individual Membership  \$15      Family Membership  \$25  
Lifetime Membership  \$100 per person

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