



Pawlett Historical Society
P.O. Box 113
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Pages from the
**PAWLET
SCRAPBOOK**



Pawlett Historical Society

April 2022

A message from the President...

Springtime greetings to all,

The PHS has been making plans to resume some of our popular programming. Beginning with a speaker event on May 21st, 4 p.m. at the Pawlet Town Hall: *Reading Places: Art, Architecture, and Gravestones in Early Vermont*. A look at the architecture, gravestones, furniture, ironwork, paintings, pottery, and textiles of early Vermont, presented by William Hosley.

We will follow up with our Tag and Bake Sale at the Pawlet Fire Department on June 11th, 8 a.m. to, 1 p.m. with drop-off on June 10th, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Many of us have been saving up for this event and we expect there will be something for almost everyone.

Stay tuned for our mid-summer speaker/ice cream social at the Chriss Monroe Chapel.

Due to the wonderful generosity of our community, we are able to continue our mission to clean up the old cemeteries in Pawlet. Save the date of September 17th to join us for our next clean-up date, once again in coordination with the Vermont Old Cemeteries association.

We hope you find this newsletter both enjoyable and informative.

Rose Smith, President

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NEWSLETTER

Rhonda Schlangen, Editor
Susan Hosley

COMING EVENTS

May:

Speaker: William Hosley
*Reading Places: Art, Architecture,
and Gravestones in Early Vermont.*
May 21, 2022
4 p.m. at the Pawlet Town Hall

June:

Annual Tag Sale
Drop off donations on June 10, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Tag sale on June 11, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Please: No Clothing or Electronics

Upcoming events:

Saturday, May 21st, 4 p.m.: Reading Places: Art, Architecture & Gravestones in Early Vermont with historian Willaim Hosley at the Pawlet Town Hall

Saturday, June 11th, 8 a.m. - 1 p.m.: Tag and Bake Sale at the Pawlet Fire Department; donations drop-off on June 10th, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Please: No Clothing or Electronics

Honey Combs

Sarah and Jack Rath

Mystery Solved!

When the Historical Society acquired a honey pail from eBay, we were curious about the label which read *R.K. Combs, West Pawlet, VT*. Who was that? Rhonda Schlangen asked the public through a Facebook post to help find out more about it and soon, we had several people from the Combs family answering our query, restoring our faith in the usefulness of technology. Through a zoom interview with Elaine Combs Adams and her daughter Eva Williams, who now live in Maryland, my husband Jack and I set out to learn more about this family and their West Pawlet honey business. In 1942 Milton K. Combs bought one hundred hives of honeybees from a Mr. Clark. Thus began a family business in West Pawlet, which continued through the late 1960s.

Most of the honey was packaged in glass bottles, unlike the 5 lb. tin pail the Society acquired. They also sold comb honey. Now 83 years old, Elaine Combs Adams told us stories about riding with her father down Route 7 to North Adams and over Hogback Mountain on Route 9 to supply gift shops with honey. Much of his business was mail order, including sending honey to well-known names such as Mr. Gulden of mustard fame and Milton Hershey of chocolate fame.

Milton Combs had an average of 400 hives each year, and one year reached 500 hives. These were spread out in bee yards throughout our area. Milton brought bees to orchards in Dorset for pollination and also worked there. Elaine and others in the family told of helping extract the honey in the Braintree School during the 1950s and 60s. They also all helped to paste labels on the jars.

Elaine remembers her father working the bees in just a tee-shirt and usually without a veil or gloves. She also said they didn't really eat much honey, just occasionally with bread and butter. While talking with Elaine and her daughter Eva we learned that bears were not a problem to beekeepers then. They certainly are a problem now, forcing beekeepers to fence all their bee yards.

Milton died in 1958, and his son Roger K. Combs took over the business. Roger also worked as a New York State bee inspector. According to Richard Combs, Roger's son, his father sold his hives to the Myers family in Granville in the late 1960s.



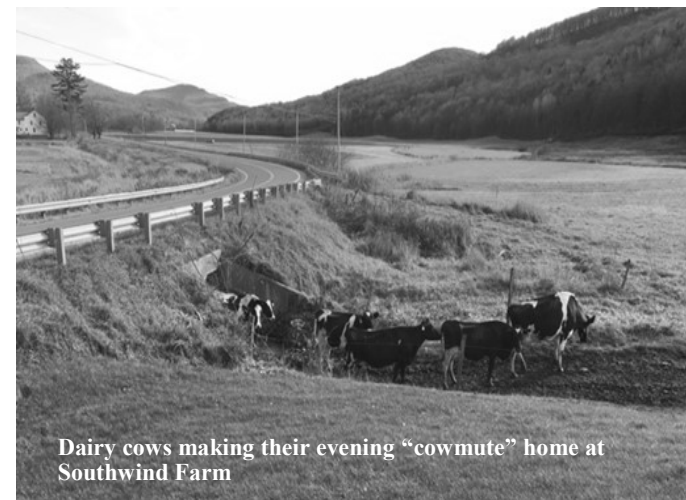
Milton Coombs and his daughter Elaine, about 1932

Our friend and fellow beekeeper Peter Genier (related to the family by marriage) worked for Roger as a young man and learned beekeeping on the job. Peter started his own bee business, which grew to thousands of colonies. When Peter retired he sold part of his operation to Tristan Winpenny from Pawlet. Tristan learned the bee business from Peter. Peter retired to Hawaii but couldn't stay away from bees. He started a bee operation in Hawaii with his family and Tristan. We, Sarah and Jack Rath, also keep bees and raise queens for sale in West Pawlet. It has been fascinating for us to learn some beekeeping history right here in Pawlet. Many thanks to the family members who made contributions to this article: Elaine C. Adams, Eva Williams, Cynthia Holbrook, Richard Combs, and Peter Genier.

Cow Tunnels of The Mettowee Valley

Ken Major

A few years ago I was speaking with lifelong Pawlet resident Nate Smith in the front yard of the home along Route 30 where he was raised in the 1940s, in an area north of our fair village that was known back in the day as "Spanktown." He was painting a picture of local history for me, and explained how cows from a neighbor's farm would cross Route 30 there daily in order to graze. Trying to imagine this, my relatively recently-arrived-from-Texas imagination conjured images of terrible encounters between cows and the drivers I'd so far experienced (mostly with license plates that ended with ork, sey, and tts) who seemed to use that particular stretch of Pawlet as some sort of salt flats-like high speed proving ground. I asked Mr. Smith, "What about all the cars?!" After a respectful pause, he chuckled gently and asked in return, "What cars?" He went on to tell me, with a benevolent patience that I've always appreciated, that at that time, Route 30 was a simple dirt road in the country, traveled mostly by locals, and liable to mire almost any vehicle that dared to test it during the worst of mud season. What a difference a generation or two would make.



In 1943, 91 percent of Vermont's road surfaces were dirt.¹ When the majority of Route 30 was finally paved in the late 1940s through mid-1950s,² Pawlet had just 1,147 inhabitants, just over half the 1910 census. Up until that time, much of Vermont had simply been difficult to reach and experienced relatively limited tourism along with a net out-migration of younger generations. But paving Vermont roads was part of a larger national postwar investment in infrastructure that included the creation of the interstate highways system, and along with the exponen-

tial expansion of American car manufacturing (frozen from 1942-45 for the war effort) and pent up demand after the Great Depression and years of wartime rationing, suddenly an entirely different level of tourism and general movement of people opened up. People took to rural, now paved, roads in numbers and at speeds never encountered before in Vermont, commuting became common, and bus-sing children to centralized schools became the norm. Unfortunately, this *was* somewhat of a problem for cows. For at least a few years, the old ways of dairy cows transiting Route 30 to pasture or water and returning to their barns, sometimes twice a day, conflicted with the increasing frequency and velocity of travel on the valley's main thoroughfare. Multigenerational resident of the Mettowee Valley, Marcia Russo, shared with me recently that her father, Robert Graf (b. 1915) would accompany their cows as they crossed the road at Southwind Farm in Rupert, standing guard over the herd with a stout stick he wouldn't hesitate to use...on the hood of any vehicle being too aggressive in its approach. It was Graf as an eventual longtime state legislator who was apparently instrumental in creating an elegant solution to this problem: the cattle underpass.

As far as locals remember, as many as 9 passes under Route 30 were built from the 1950s on from Rupert to Pawlet, allowing dairy cows to make their daily traverses in modern style, with no disruption to driver or bovine alike (and fewer dented hoods from protective farmer-legislators, one imagines). The first actual law on the books that I could find, 19 V.S.A. § 507, dates to 1985 and, as part of chapter of statutes that cover fair treatment of property owners related to state highways, ensures that a cattle pass "of reinforced concrete, metal, or other suitable material" approximately 5 feet wide and 6 feet tall will be provided based on the "reasonable need" of the owners of "large modern farm properties." Everyone wins!

Between 1960 and 2010, Pawlet saw net population gains in five consecutive censuses, the only time that has happened in its history (the prior record is two, from 1790-1810). And while people steadily moved here, tourism expanded, and the car became an indispensable part of daily life, dairy farming also changed. As farms shifted from stanchion barns and baled hay to freestall barns using silos, feeding practices relied less and less on grazing. And though every gallon of milk produced by 2007 took 90% less land and 65% less water than one in 1944,³ the number of dairy farms has declined steadily in Vermont, dropping

¹ MacQuarrie, Brian. "The History of Vermont's Interstate System - Good and Bad - Comes to Life in Cache of Photos." Boston.com, The Boston Globe, 25 Sept. 2011.

² https://vtransmaps.vermont.gov/Maps/TownMapSeries/Rutland_Co/PAWLET/

³ U.S. Dairy. "What Is the Carbon Footprint of Milk?" *Milk Carbon Footprint: Dairy Production | U.S. Dairy*, National Dairy Council, 15 Jan. 2016, <https://www.usdairy.com/news-articles/what-is-the-carbon-footprint-of-a-gallon-of-milk>.

Pawlet Postcards Then and Now

One of the ways the Pawlett Historical Society stewards our community's history is by cataloging and preserving items related to the history of Pawlet—including West Pawlet, and North Pawlet. These included books, maps, postcards, photos, periodicals, letters, diaries, genealogies, and clothing. Many of these items are donated, but we occasionally purchase items from sources like eBay. In early 2022 we acquired several postcards depicting Pawlet and West Pawlet. These postcards are snapshots in time and give us a glimpse of previous iterations of our community. To help fill in the story these postcards tell, and how our community has continued to grow and change, we are posting the postcards on the PHS Facebook page and inviting people to share their recollections and current images of these same locations.

Here is more of what we learned about these postcards and West Pawlet then and now: The large, three-story brown building at the center of the image was a hotel and then the Odd Fellows Hall. According to one community member, who lived on New Street in the 1960s, walking past the vacant building on the way to Dutchies store was a scary experience. The building was dismantled in the 1970s, and the lumber was repurposed for other buildings in the community. Some of the lumber was used to build an addition to the Holbrook's barn on the Switch Road. Church Street was aptly named, with at least three churches clustered together. One of the churches remains, and the small house behind the church, on New Street, still stands.

In the intervening hundred years or so, more buildings have come and gone. The trees have filled in. The railroad tracks were abandoned and then developed into a rail trail. The slate piles are still part of our landscape and a reminder of the industry that brought so many immigrants from different countries to West Pawlet.

In future issues of this newsletter, we will continue to share the postcards of different areas of Pawlet.

A photo of downtown West Pawlet, taken from above the slate quarries to the Northeast and looking down on New Street. The postcard is undated, but thanks to a helpful reader, we have narrowed the possible window to about 1905-1920.



Another postcard, taken around the same time. This shot is from above what is currently Route 153, looking down over Euclid Street. The railroad tracks are visible, along with the homes and farms on current Route 29 to New York.



Platt Herrick article corrections

In our February newsletter we published a list of past industries in Pawlet, as remembered by 92 year old Platt Herrick. He generously shared his recollections and stories, helping us envision Pawlet during his lifetime. After we published our newsletter, Platt offered some corrections to some names of businesses that we got wrong. Corrections are underlined.

Present Post Office and residence...and later J. Towslee's John Deere and New Idea dealership. Still later, J Rodovitch car repair...

“Allen's Inn” rooming house between Hardware Store and Masonic Hall.

Telephone office in residence of William Foote, now Mr. McKenzie residence.

In later years Guimond milk plant built on Danby-Pawlet Road east of junction with Route 133...Town Highway Garage.

Thanks again to Platt and all our community members who remember and generously share their stories about our history.

Reading Places: Art, Architecture & Gravestones in Early Vermont

A presentation by William Hosley
Saturday, May 21 at 4:00 p.m.
Pawlet Town Hall

Art and History intersect at the point where people shape their environments. This lecture presents a version of Vermont history that begins with looking at objects made and used by the State's early settlers. In developing their towns, Vermonters created a wide range of things that speak to their values, background, skills, and cultural attitudes. Their architecture, gravestones, furniture, ironwork, paintings, pottery, and textiles are evocative documents of specific people, places, and situations. This lecture will demonstrate how art and artifacts can be used to understand historical experiences. It will also introduce the audience to outstanding museums, places and public collections throughout Vermont which they may like to visit..

William Hosley is a historian, preservationist, writer, and photographer. Bill discovered his passion for art, architecture and local history prowling around Vermont during his years as a student at Vermont Academy and Middlebury College. By the age of 25, he'd visited all 251 towns in Vermont. Hosley was formerly director of the New Haven Museum and Connecticut Landmarks and was a curator and exhibition developer at Wadsworth Atheneum. He is writing a book about the public work of local history and how it restores public spirit.

Cow tunnels cont from pg 5

more than 87% during that same period of time.⁴ Currently there are 572 dairy farms in the state, with just 40 in Rutland County and only 10 in Bennington County.⁵

Today, while changes in transportation and the dairy industry have created a much different Vermont landscape than the one Mr. Smith grew up with, you can still catch a glimpse of one interesting chapter in the coexistence of old ways and new: just one Rt 30 cow pass in our valley has remained in continuous use, located right on the border of Pawlet and Rupert. So this summer, the next time you pass by Southwind Farm (now run by 6th generation farmer, and Mr. Graf's grandson, Jeremy Russo and his family), just north of that big banked turn beloved by motorists, keep an eye out for a procession of Vermont's iconic ladies passing underneath you, gracefully and without stopping the march of progress, through their own convenient cow tunnel.

Ken Major is a clinical psychologist who has served veterans and active duty National Guard members since 2003. In his spare time, he enjoys a variety of hobbies, including learning about history and occasional metal detecting. He and his family have called Pawlet home since 2011.

⁴"Dairy Farm Numbers". Vermont Dairy. Archived from the original on October 2, 2010. Retrieved March 18, 2022. https://web.archive.org/web/20101002180402/http://www.vermontdairy.com/dairy_industry/farms/numbers
⁵Buteux Read, Maria. "Interview of Anson Tebbetts ." *Edible Vermont*, vol. 7, Spring , 2022, pp. 22–29.



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