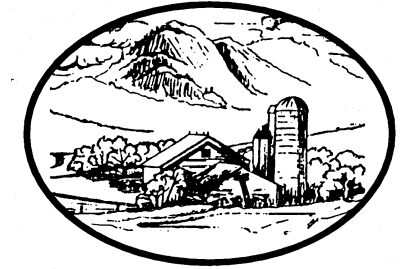




Pawlett Historical Society
P.O. Box 113
Pawlet, Vermont 05761

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Pages from the
**PAWLET
SCRAPBOOK**



Pawlett Historical Society

February 2023

A message from the President...

On behalf of the entire board, thank you to all who have contributed to the annual appeal and/or renewed their membership. The generosity of our community allows your Pawlett Historical Society to continue the mission of conservation and outreach. If you haven't already contributed or renewed your membership, there is still time, and your support would be greatly appreciated.

Our plans for upcoming events are in the works. There will be two cemetery clean-up days, the first is May 6th, and the second is September 23rd under the expert guidance of Tom Giffin of the Vermont Olde Cemetery Association. We also invite you to join us on July 22nd for our 50th anniversary celebration. Look for details in an upcoming newsletter.

We welcome back to our board Ken Major. His contributions to the newsletters have been entertaining and informative. Look for his feature on outhouses in this edition of the newsletter. You'll also find Ken's bio, along with that of Jack Rath, who we welcomed as a Trustee last fall.

We also recognize our newest volunteer, Carol Schoenwetter, who brings enthusiasm to our planning. If you would like to volunteer for one of our committees, your help would be welcome. Assisting with the collections, buildings & grounds, 50th anniversary planning, farm project, or providing event refreshments are just a few of the opportunities for getting involved. Leave a message with your preferences and contact information at 802-645-0306.

Kind regards and keep warm,

Rose Smith

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Rose Smith
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Judy Coolidge
Treasurer

John Malcolm
Secretary

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Sarah Rath
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Jack Rath

Rhonda Schlangen

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**NEWSLETTER
PRODUCTION**

Rhonda Schlangen (editor),

Susan Hosley, Judy Coolidge,

Theresa Jones

Membership

Thank you to those who have renewed their membership and/or donated to our annual appeal. We encourage anyone who hasn't renewed this year to do so. Membership rates are: \$10 single membership, \$15 family, \$25 contributing, \$50 sustaining. Donations of any amount are also welcome. Please send checks to Pawlett Historical Society PO Box 113 Pawlet, VT 05761.

COMING EVENTS

Saturday, May 6:

Cemetery Clean-up by PHS and Community Volunteers

Saturday, July 22:

Pawlett Historical Society 50th Anniversary Celebration

Free Events

Refreshments

Saturday, September 23:

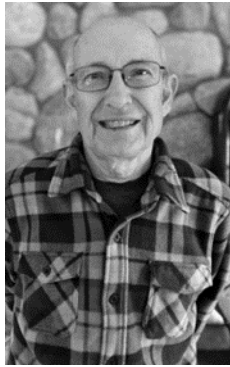
Cemetery clean-up by PHS and community volunteers

Please stay tuned for details!

Welcome Trustees Jack Rath and Ken Major

Jack Rath

Jack came to the area 45 years ago to practice large animal veterinary medicine. He is fascinated with local history and knows many of the local farms and farmers, remembering fondly many farms that are no longer active. He is currently a bee-keeper and breeder of honey-bee queens for sale to other beekeepers. When not working bees he enjoys tinkering in the shop working on antique engines or clocks. He lives with his honey, Sarah, in West Pawlet.



Ken Major

Ken's family has called Pawlet home since 2011. A long-term member of the PHS, Ken recently returned as a Trustee. Professionally, he works with veterans as a clinical psychologist. He fell in love with local history initially through metal detecting a few years back. He was very fortunate to have found some special artifacts and connected with wonderful people in our community whose families have often inhabited our area for several generations; they have generously shared their knowledge with him. As a result he is passionate about discovering and telling stories about unusual connections between objects and their history, as well as changes in everyday life across time that might otherwise be forgotten. *Feel free to contact Ken with stories or ideas about local history: kenmajorvt@gmail.com*



SAVE THE DATE:

July 22, 2023

Pawlett Historical Society 50th Celebration (established 1973)

- ◆ Free events for children and adults
- ◆ Historical textiles display, photographs, maple history, farm history and more.
- ◆ Refreshments will be served

The Pawlet Memory Tree

by Judy Coolidge

Each year at the beginning of the holiday season community members get together to light up the trees on the green in front of the Library as part of "Light Up Pawlet". From December 2021 through December 2022 our town was hit unusually hard with the loss of so many of our residents or people who had ties to our town. To honor those we lost in 2022, we created a first-ever Memory Tree. The tree was adorned with blue lights and a card with the name of each of the thirty-seven people who had passed was placed on the tree.



Those honored were:

Homer Brown, Gordon "Joe" Bruce, Barbara Clark, Leon Clark, Cindy Collard, Laura Stewart Coleman, Robert Combs, Alan Cooper, Barbara Donegan, George Ennis, Diane Ross Haskins, Peter Haskins, Beverly A. Hawkins, Richard J. Hulett, Kenneth L. Leach, Carol McNealus Jaffe, William Jordan, Charlotte Jordan, Iva M. Liebig, Golan Lurvey, Gerald "Jake" Mason, Keith C. Mason, Anne Smith McHenry, Stephen Metcalfe, Betsy Moore, Erik Nelson, Michael Parks, Jonas Rosenthal, James "Jim" Ross, Roy "Bud" Ross, Bradley "John" Sargent, Natale L. Smith, Jordan Smith, Douglas Waite, Gladys Waite, Joanne Greene Waite, Kathleen Young.

The PHS wishes to offer our most sincere condolences to all the families and friends of those who left us last year.

Cont. from pg 4, Outhouse

sciences: by the early 20th century the first scientific sampling efforts showed that 40% or more of children in the South were infected with hookworm (with some counties in Arkansas alone showing 75% infection rates for the entire population⁵). Chronic hookworm infection⁶ caused anemia and protein deficiency due to blood loss to the parasite. Referred to as "the lazy disease," the resulting fatigue, reduced cognitive function, and delayed child development all had far-reaching and generational educational and economic effects, as well as led to cultural stigmas about the South.⁷ "Roosevelt Outhouses" markedly improved sanitation with a few key features, including a cement form, a lid that closed tightly to prevent flies, and a ventilation shaft that was also screened. In a remarkable but largely forgotten public health intervention, the WPA outhouse spree appears to have paved the way for the eradication of hookworm infection by the 1950s, and led to measurable subsequent increases in academic and economic achievement in that region.⁸

In addition to outhouse sanitation and related public health improvements, the mid-twentieth century also saw the rapid adoption of full indoor plumbing in the rural United States. In the 1940s nearly a third of homes in Vermont still lacked flushing toilets, but by the 1960 census that



A 12-stall, 3-story outhouse in St. Louis, late 1800s. Public domain.

⁵Hayden, Rebecca. "Encyclopedia of Arkansas." *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/hookworm-eradication-2233/. Accessed 3 Jan. 2023.

⁶CDC. "CDC - Hookworm - Disease." *www.cdc.gov*, 17 Apr. 2019, www.cdc.gov/parasites/hookworm/disease.html.

⁷Nuwer, Rachel. "How a Worm Gave the South a Bad Name." *NOVA*, 17 Apr. 2016. www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/how-a-worm-gave-the-south-a-bad-name.

⁸Bleakley, H. "Disease and Development: Evidence from Hookworm Eradication in the American South." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 122, no. 1, 1 Feb. 2007, pp. 73-117, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3800113/, 10.1162/qjec.121.1.73. Accessed 1 Apr. 2019.



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number had dropped below 10%. That rate of progress was slightly better than the national average, with the country not reaching a 95+% rate of household toilets until 1970. By contrast, in 1960 more than 39% of homes in Mississippi still lacked a toilet (the highest rate in the nation), and that state did not get its rate under 5% until 1990.⁹ The national adoption of indoor toilets continued to improve in subsequent decades until the question was removed from the 2020 Census American Community Survey.

Now almost universal, indoor toilets have made life unimaginably easier as well as vastly improved public health. Yet for some there is a sense of loss in this transition. A charming eulogy for the outhouse was recorded by Billy Edd Wheeler in 1964 and available on YouTube;¹⁰ it is well worth a listen for the history, emotion, and humor it imparts. I also spoke (under a reasonable condition of anonymity) a few weeks ago about this project with a friend who relied on an outhouse for years as an adult. She shared that seeing the stars clearly on freezing winter nights filled her with awe and made her wish we all still experienced such a thing regularly. While I cherish her enthusiasm, when contemplating a 0 degree toilet seat or a bonding experience like the one portrayed in the opening joke, I for one am fine with leaving all things outhouse behind.

⁹US Census. "Historical Census of Housing Tables: Sewage Disposal." *Census.gov*, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/coh-sewage.html>

¹⁰Wheeler, Billy Edd. *Ode to the Little Brown Shack out Back*. Memories of America. Kapp Records, 1964. Available at: <https://youtu.be/8ugE7svz9xM>

Remembering Keith C. Mason and Gerald C. Mason

By Judy Coolidge

It is with heartfelt sadness that we dedicate this newsletter to two community servants and former trustees of the PHS. Keith C. Mason passed away on November 25, 2022 and his uncle, Gerald C. Mason (aka Jerry or Jake) passed away on December 7, 2022.

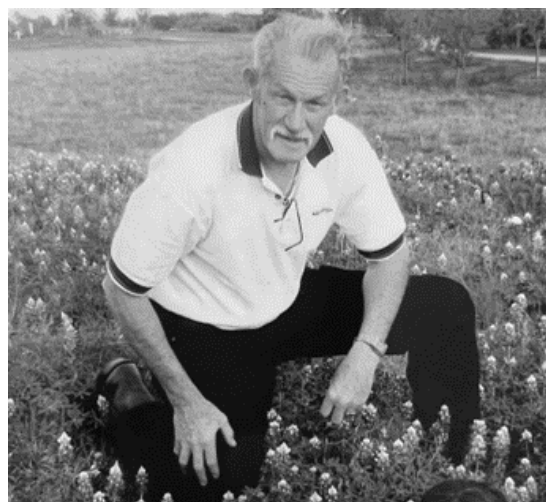
Keith retired as Road Foreman for the town of Pawlet a short time before his passing, having served for twenty-two years. His patience, calm demeanor, and ability to handle difficult situations with grace made him the perfect person for the job. He also brought these attributes to his roles as Selectboard member, Development Review Board chairman, president of the Cemetery Association, and trustee of the PHS. He was a well-respected sheep superintendent at the Champlain Valley Expo and judge of many sheep shows. An avid outdoorsman and hunter, he shared his enthusiasm with his family and friends, and was a hunter safety and bow hunting instructor for many years. His willingness to serve others was endless.

According to Keith's obituary, "When scouting for the next hunting season and you spot a big buck, fawn, or doe in a meadow, or see a turkey, a thought of Keith will pass through your mind. He will long be remembered for his kind and gentle heart, his endless patience, incredible intellect, fairness, and stoic nature all served up with a little smirk. He leaves a tremendous void within the community of Pawlet and will be missed by many."



Keith C. Mason

Jerry was born a dairy farmer. He served his country in the United States Air Force for thirty years, traveling throughout the world. After retirement he was always on the move, whether it be flying his twin engine plane, traveling the country on his Harley Davidson motorcycle, driving his little Shriners car in the local parades, or running or walking on the Danby-Pawlet Road. The Shriners Hospital for Children was near and dear to his heart. In the summer he could be found in the hayfield with his brother, Charlie, and nephews, continuing the life-long tradition of working together on Roblee Farm. He was a supporter of the Pawlet Community Church and Food Pantry as well as many other organizations. A longtime member of the Pawlett Historical Society, he served as trustee for many years. Jerry will be remembered as the go-to guy for making the motion to adjourn the meeting, a task continued by his niece, Marlee, after he left. To quote Jerry's obituary: "Gerald had a servant's heart. Service to family, friends, country, land, and countless organizations, all done in a quiet unassuming way. He left Vermont to serve the country, but Vermont never left him."



Gerald C. Mason

The Pawlett Historical Society trustees wish to extend our love and condolences to the entire Mason Family. Thank You Keith and Jerry. May you both rest in peace.

Odds and Ends: A Brief History of the Outhouse

By Kenneth Major

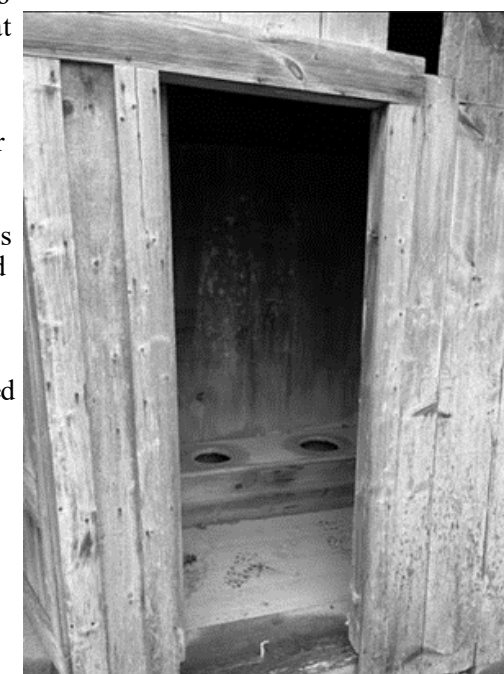
It's 1922 in rural Vermont. A farmer and a visiting flatlander both have to heed nature's call at the same time, and so make their way to the two-seat outhouse on the farmer's property. As the farmer stands up from his necessities a nickel falls out of his pocket and into the privy. He sighs, then reaches into his wallet, takes out a \$5 bill, and tosses it down into the mire. His guest, bewildered, asks, "What on earth did you do that for?!" The farmer replies, "Well, I'm not climbing down there for only a nickel!"

This joke,¹ which represents just a fraction of what we might refer to as "outhouse humor," intimately connects us to the reality of what preceded the astonishingly recent advent of indoor plumbing. As I learned through this writing process, the history of the outhouse includes not only some remarkably different social norms and practical solutions than the ones we enjoy today but also a shocking public health problem that once jeopardized the well-being of a large part of this country.

A person today under 70 years old or raised in an urban setting will likely find it surprising just how recently flushing toilets arrived in the home as an everyday technology: humans had visited the moon before full indoor plumbing was ubiquitous in rural America. Harder still to imagine are the conditions and customs associated with earlier answers to this ever-present problem. From ancient Roman public latrines to the "two-holers" found both at the PHS Braintree and North Pawlet schoolhouses, there is solid archaeological and cultural evidence across millennia for the ubiquity of communal (read: shoulder-to-shoulder) experiences of voiding. And while it was likely more common for outhouses with multiple seats to be used in family settings and based on shared age or gender, other public examples beyond schools do exist, particularly associated with boarding houses and inns, such as the restored six-seat outhouse at the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, Connecticut that likely hosted George Washington and other military planners in the midst of the Revolution.² We don't know much about how notions of bathroom privacy

evolved over time, but photographic evidence from American cities suggests that enclosed, single seat, multi-stall outhouses had become the norm by the early 20th century in cities that had not yet extended indoor plumbing and sewer systems fully, particularly in the tenements that housed extraordinary numbers of immigrants and other poor.

We can suppose that for centuries in colder climates it was not just a lack of privacy but also weather and season that had to be factored into the decision to head outside or not. Imagine the reluctance a person might have to venture into snow, subzero temperatures, and/or the darkness of night to manage things. Chamber pots, common throughout rural and urban households before indoor plumbing, would be used when a trip to the outhouse wasn't possible or preferable, and would be emptied each morning into the outhouse or street. It may come as no surprise that such primitive



View into one of the two-seat stalls of the Braintree School outhouse on Route 153, West Pawlet.

overall sanitation patterns were responsible for numerous health issues throughout history, but what is remarkable is just how far, and in what ways, these problems persisted into the 20th century.

Rural outhouses received a surprising amount of attention nationally during the Great Depression through the Works Public Administration. In addition to 29,000 bridges and 4,000 schools, the WPA built more than 2 million outhouses in America from 1933-39. This effort by the Roosevelt administration was so visible that across the country outhouses were thereafter referred to as the "Roosevelt Room," the "White House," or even "The Presidential Suite."³ The WPA put people to work during an economic crisis in ways that benefited larger society, in this case a targeted sanitation effort aimed to reduce the health burdens from a variety of waterborne diseases and contamination of streams, wells, and soils associated with outhouses. Nowhere were those problems more prevalent

than in the southern states. Due to high water tables as well as cultural practice it was more common in the South to have open-backed "surface privies," outhouses that lacked a dug hole to contain waste and drained onto topsoil.⁴ When combined with bare feet (due to climate and economics), this pattern of poor sanitation resulted in a part of American history largely unknown outside of the health

¹My thanks to Lenny Gibson for this and insight into modern problems with septage re-use regulations and local history, which I hope to tackle in a future article

²Landrigan, Leslie. "Colonial Outhouses, or George Washington (Probably) Sat Here." *New England Historical Society*, 9 Mar. 2015, newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/colonial-outhouses-or-george-washington-probably-sat-here/. Accessed 3 Jan. 2023.

³Landrigan, Leslie. "In Search of the Roosevelt Outhouse in New England." *New England Historical Society*, 27 Sept. 2020, www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/in-search-of-the-roosevelt-outhouse-in-new-england/. Accessed 3 Jan. 2023.

⁴Wilder, L. H. "An Open-Backed Surface Privy, Figure for "the Sanitary Privy" by C. W. Stiles (1911), U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin 463." *Www.nal.usda.gov*, 1910, www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/speccoll/exhibits/show/parasitic-diseases-with-econom/item/8102. Accessed 3 Jan. 2023.