



Brookfield Historical Society News

March 2010

Volume 77, Issue 1

Events

*2010 Sunset Lake
Ice-Out Contest*
See enclosed raffle
ticket sheet.

*VT History Expo
2010, June 26-27,*
Tunbridge Fair
Grounds

Victorian Tea,
July 11, at the
Marvin Newton
House

*The Daly/Stone Ice
Cream Social,*
Aug. 1, at the
Marvin Newton
House

*Annual Meeting and
Historical
Presentation with
Potluck Supper,*
October 17, (details
in the next News).

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The History of Brookfield, Vermont—New Edition Coming Soon

How does a town history get written? In the preface, the editors of *The History of Brookfield* (1987) write, "During the winter of 1984-1985, Thelma Hill typed a copy of Mr. Wild's entire hand written manuscript and Alice Wakefield began collecting articles and family histories to expand and update Brookfield's history. The files of the Brookfield Historical Society, recently organized by Arthur and Doris Hill, were an invaluable source of information. These included student essays sponsored by Anna Clark Jones, presentations given by individuals at Historical Society Meetings, and genealogical research by Polly Craig. During the winter of 1986-1987 a committee consisting of Thelma Hill, Margaret Stone, Alice Wakefield, and Carl Bushey, Jr. met weekly to edit the information for the History. The book is a result of a joint effort by the Brookfield Historical Society and many interested citizens. Marion Knight, Edna Anne Lamson, and Ralph Lamson spent many hours proofreading the materials." (p. iv)

Why a new edition? It has been 25 years since work on the existing edition began. Much has happened since then.

The population of Brookfield has grown from 959 people (1980 Census) to an estimated 1,239 people (2008 Census Bureau estimate), which is a 29 percent increase. Over the same period, Orange County has grown from 22,739 to 28,917 people, a 27 percent increase, and the population of Vermont has grown from 511,456 to 621,270, or by 21 percent.

Costs have also increased. Inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index is up 87 percent from 1987 to the present. Brookfield's grand list has grown from \$335,137 in 1987 to \$1,593,667 in 2008. The Brookfield tax rate has decreased from 2.06 in 1987 to 1.2321 in 2008.

Members of the community continue to take pride in Brookfield through their volunteer work and donations. For example, the Brookfield School Club and others are working to provide resources to enhance student education. The Brookfield Community Partnership is working to renovate the Old Town Hall to have a community center. And existing organizations such as the Brookfield Fire Department and the Brookfield Historical Society continue to thrive because of community support. Organizations like these and other events are not in *The History of Brookfield*—much needs to be done to document our history.

Some important events are missing from the 1987 *History of Brookfield*. Yes, you can only put so much in one volume, but the interstate highway has had a major impact on Vermont and Brookfield. I-89 went right through Brookfield.

Three interstate highways (four-lanes) totaling 321 miles now cross Vermont. These interstate highways did not exist at the end of World War II. At that time, 9 percent of Vermont's roads were paved,

(Continued on page 3)

Letter from the President

Dear members and friends,

This year, your Brookfield Historical Society board of trustees, in collaboration with Alice Wakefield, embarked on the ambitious project of updating and reprinting *The History of Brookfield*. The Book Committee, composed of Elinor Gray, Jackie Wilder, Carl Bushey, Jr., Gary Lord and Alice, has begun the task of revision and editing. The trustees are excited about the project and look forward to its publication. Before that can happen, however, we must raise enough money to actually print the book. We hope to do this with help from the Town, advance sales, and donations. We are confident that the citizens of Brookfield will actively support the project. The first History, published in 1987, sold very well, and we anticipate that most people will want to own the revised version, which will include a new variety of photographs. Our collection of photos is extensive, and it merits a wider distribution. The book will be published in a soft cover edition.

The 2010 *Historical Photograph Collection and Calendar* is available for purchase from any of the trustees, the Town Hall, Cover to Cover, Pond Village Congregational Church, Messier's General Store, or Floyd's Store in Randolph Center. Sales of the calendar support the Society. The theme this year is "Businesses in Brookfield."

Summary of 2009 Events

The sixth annual "Ice-Out Contest" came to a conclusion when the timing apparatus went through the ice on April 17th at precisely 5:56 a.m., three days later than last year. All the winners were from Brookfield -- Raymond Doane, Jr. won the first prize, with Ellan Cole and Jared Wheeler coming next closest, before and after. In addition to the benefit to the Society, this event is a celebration of the arrival of spring.

The Annual Victorian Tea took place at the Marvin Newton House on June 28th. There were two seatings, 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. Guests were treated to a variety of savories and cookies, served by members of the board. The 2009 Exhibit featured quilts from Brookfield, assembled by Christine DeMatteis and Elinor Gray. In addition to the quilts from the Society's collection, several quilts were loaned by local families.

On July 19th at 2:00 p.m. Mary Floyd presented a program entitled "Interesting Facts about Old Quilts." The event was well attended, and all enjoyed the informative presentation. The collection was on exhibit each Sunday from July 12th through August 30th.

The Ice Cream Social last summer was held on August 2nd from 2:00 to 4:00. Many people came to eat ice cream and view the quilt exhibit. This is always a popular event.

Finally, the Annual Meeting was held on October 18th at the Pond Village Church Fellowship Hall. The program, sponsored by the Vermont Humanities Council Speakers Bureau and the BHS, featured Jim Cooke presenting his much acclaimed "Cranky Yankees." It included impressions of Calvin Coolidge, Daniel Webster and John Quincy Adams, and was both vastly entertaining and informative. It was followed by a delicious potluck supper. There was a raffle drawing following the presentation, with an original Tom Clifford painting of Basin Harbor as the first prize. Other prizes included maple syrup and historical photographs and calendars.

This year we have had some changes in the Board of Trustees. Michael Dempsey, President, resigned effective October 18, 2009, the date of our Annual Meeting. We extend our thanks and appreciation to Michael for his leadership, service and many contributions to the Society. Linda Runnion, Vice President, is presently serving as interim president. Joanna Bodenweber has also stepped down from the board. Joanna has been an integral member of the board, taking over the production of the Historical Photograph Collection and Calendar from Chris DeMatteis, who with Elinor Gray and Jackie Wilder, produced the publication for the first several years. Joanna will continue to produce the calendar, and we thank her for her many valuable contributions to the board during her tenure. Mary Waldo has resigned as treasurer but will continue as a board member. Greg Wight has taken over the position of treasurer. We welcomed Rachel Andreyev and Pat Mayer to the board.

Linda Runnion, Interim President

History of Brookfield – Continued from page 1

51 percent were gravel, and 40 percent were “primitive or unimproved.” (Source: Duffy, John J., Samuel B. Hand, and Ralph H. Orth, eds. 2003. *The Vermont Encyclopedia*, p. 167)

The Federal government passed the Interstate Highway Act in 1954. To obtain federal highway funds, states had to match 10 percent. The amount needed would exceed funds available through Vermont’s traditional pay-as-you-go financial practice. Vermont Governor Joseph B. Johnson proposed borrowing the money and “justified the expense and indebtedness by arguing that ‘our highway network is a sound investment in the future of our State. It is one of our greatest selling points in our efforts to bring industry and tourists into the State and to transport our valuable agricultural products where they can be sold.’” (Source: Sherman, Michael, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash. 2004. *Freedom and Unity*, p. 524)

Construction began in 1957 and was completed by 1982. It cost about \$1 million a mile, and is the largest single public works project in the state’s history. The interstate highway system brought “80 percent of the state’s population to within thirty miles of an interchange entrance ramp.” (Duffy, Hand, and Orth 2003, p. 167)

Historians Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash write that “the interstate roads in Vermont transformed more than the economy of the state. As the number of second-homeowners, tourists, and other escapees from urban areas swelled and as many visitors took up permanent residence in Vermont, the state’s institutions, and some argued, its very character, came under new pressures.” (p. 525)

This was not the first time a highway system on this scale was proposed for the State of Vermont. In 1933, Colonel William J. Wilgus, a retired chief engineer of the New York Central Railroad living in Ascutney, proposed that the state seek National Industrial recovery Act (NIRA) funds for the construction a “Green Mountain Parkway.” It would be a 260 mile scenic highway running the length of the western crest of the Green Mountains from Massachusetts to Canada.

In 1935, the National parks Service, the U.S.

Bureau of Public Works, and the Vermont Bureau of Public Works completed a plan. The plan would cost an estimated \$18,000,000 and would be paid for by NIRA. Vermont’s obligation was \$500,000 to purchase 50,000 acres of land for the right-of-way, which the planners believed could be paid for with a tax on gasoline.

The proposal was enormously controversial. Supporters and opponents strongly debated the proposal in the General Assembly, in the newspapers, through the new medium of the radio, and finally at Town Meeting Day. Supporters believed the parkway would create thousands of jobs and thus reduce unemployment, greatly increase tourism, would be a long-term boost to the Vermont economy, protect large areas of the Green Mountain from haphazard development, and would be a sign of Vermont’s “progress.” Opponents argued that the parkway would “spoil” Vermont by scarring its natural beauty. It would “further intrusions of federal control over state’s lands...the road’s upkeep would become a huge financial burden to future taxpayers...the money it would cost the state in land acquisitions would be better spent on more pressing matters...it was likely to unwisely shift the state’s economic destiny from agriculture and local industry to tourism dependent on scenery, weather, and other unpredictable, uncontrollable factors.” (Sherman, Sessions, and Potash. 2004, p. 445)

In the fall of 1935, Governor Charles M. Smith called a special legislative on the parkway issue. This time both houses agreed to incur the bonded debt up to \$500,000 and called for an endorsement of their decision by referendum of the state’s voter at the next town meeting day. On March 3, 1936, Vermonters rejected the referendum by a vote of 43,176 to 31,101. Orange County was one of the nine counties that voted against the proposed parkway along the spine of the Green Mountains.

What did Brookfield residents think when the interstate highway eventually came through? Was it as controversial as it was for the previous generation? Read all about it in the new 2010 edition of *The History of Brookfield*.

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Society
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Officers and Trustees for
2009-2010:

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MISSION STATEMENT

To research and identify,
collect and preserve,
exhibit and interpret
artifacts, and publish
material which relates to
and illuminates the
historical development of
Brookfield.

**Brookfield Historical
Society Blog
address:**

<http://brookfieldhistoricalsociety.wordpress.com> .

**Sunset Pond
Ice-Out Record**

2004

19 April, 10:53 a.m.

2005

18 April, 8:27 a.m.

2006

13 April, 6:42 a.m.

2007

23 April, 8:13 p.m.

2008

20 April, 3:59 p.m.

2009

17 April, 5:56 a.m.

***West Brookfield & Thereabouts*—Updated 2nd Edition**

Author Alice Webster Wakefield writes, "*West Brookfield and Thereabouts* is an attempt to record history before memories fade, photos are gone, and the past is lost. West Brookfield is relatively young and shares a common thread with surrounding towns. Some of our grandfathers were born before or soon after the original settlers died. Their story is still within our grasp although collecting the details can be like restringing a pearl necklace after the pearls have scattered across a busy highway."

"After countless hours of scouring hand-written documents and with the

assistance of many helpful people, I did my best to compile a history of our community and the families who lived here. This second edition contains corrections and additions to the first edition of 1985. My deep interest in the subject comes from the knowledge that my ancestors were early settlers here." (p. 4)

The 200 page book includes photos and history of West Brookfield, Braintree, and Roxbury. It is available for through the author, Cover to Cover book store, and the Brookfield Historical Society. The book sells for \$29.

