
GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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Spring 2001

REVIEW OF GROTON, VERMONT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

This is the first in a planned series of articles on Groton in the twentieth century. The first decade - the 'aught years - from 1900 through 1909 is gleaned mainly from *The Groton Times* published by Charles C. Lord and *Mr. Glover's Groton* published by the Society. The editor



M. T. Benzie Quarry about 1905

TWENTIETH CENTURY GROTON The First Decade 1900 - 1909

At the turn of the century Groton was a bustling community of more than a thousand citizens. The census of 1900 reported a population of 1,059 people, the highest number ever reported, but only 45 more than two decades earlier. The *Groton Times* was a fledgling newspaper, that was established three years earlier in 1897 by editor, publisher, and printer, Charles C. Lord. He reported in a special *Groton and*

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OFFICERS

President	Richard Brooks
Vice President	Norma Hosmer
Secretary	Diane Kreis
Treasurer	Josephine French

MEETING SCHEDULE (second Tuesday)

May	8th at 10 AM
June	12th at 10 AM
July	10th at 10 AM

Peter Paul House, 253 Scott Hwy.

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Ryegate, Vermont Edition, in 1901 that "The three great pillars on which the prosperity of the village rests are the granite industry, the lumber business, and local trade."

The advent of the Montpelier and Wells River Rail Road, a quarter of a century earlier in 1873, provided an opportunity to develop the lumber business. Large sawmills were established at Groton Pond. The mills of A. T. Baldwin, L. D. Hazen, and A. H. Ricker employed a large force of men and horses, and made a good market for farm produce. Groton was a shipping point for half a dozen sawmills each producing half a million feet of lumber or more per annum. But by the turn of the century the lumber production had deminished and the mills at Groton Pond had been shut down for almost a decade. The lumber business continued in the new century, but with less production than before, and mills were located at Ricker's Pond, Darling (later Vail and now Seyon) Pond, and in the village. Other industries requiring wood from the farms and forests included the McCrillis bobbin mill near the iron bridge at the west end of the village until it was destroyed by fire in 1909, the Groton Novelty Works in the village, the Hall

charcoal kilns near the confluence of the two major branches of the wells river, and the wood burning locomotives on the railroad. Most households also depended on wood for heating and cooking.

With the shrinking of the lumber business, the granite industry became the industrial promise for the future. The Honorable Jonathan R. Darling, judge and entrepreneur, invested some of his lumbering wealth in the granite business. He built the first stone shed in Groton for manufacturing granite products in 1896 and a second one in 1898. A year earlier, in 1895, Fred Webber and his father, George W. Webber, opened the first granite quarry in Groton on the Crown farm about a mile and a quarter from the village. The Darling, the Benzie, and the Hatch quarries, located next to Pine Mountain were just starting to produce granite as the century began. The Hatch and the Benzie quarries had a fine evenly mixed medium granite well adapted for statuary and monumental work. The stone sheds, located near the depot, employed more than one hundred skilled men at the turn of the century.

Although the growth of the lumber business was

declining, the granite business and the local trade in the village were growing. In the first decade of the century the village had three large general stores, a hotel, two boarding houses, a meat market, hardware store, two harness shops, drug store, jeweler, two barbers, two painters, three blacksmiths, two firms of drovers, one sawmill, one grist mill, one carriage repair shop, one milliner, one photographer, one undertaker, and three granite sheds where five firms operated. The Groton depot was the largest shipping point between Montpelier and Wells River.

Groton High School, established in 1897, had it's first graduate in 1903 when a diploma was earned by Inez Ricker. A total of twenty four students graduated during the decade: George Whitehill, Harry Morrison, and George Morrison in 1904; Clyde Coffrin, Grace Dennis, Elizabeth Whitehill, Abbie Welch, Gertrude Clark, and Bessie Blanchard in 1905; Harry Coruth, Maude Hood, Pearl Keenan, Nettie Page, and Waldo Pillsbury in 1906; Fred Morrison and Irene Page in 1907; Katie Downs, Emma Jones, Virginia Ricker, and Helen Smith in 1908; and Elizabeth Scott, Millie

Whitehill, and Lucretia Taylor in 1909. The last two years of high school were discontinued in 1909 and students were tuitioned to other schools to finish their studies. The town had six rural schools in addition to the village school. The village school was divided into four departments, primary, intermediate, grammar, and high. About 120 pupils attended the village school including all twelve grades and each rural school with eight grades had fifteen to twenty students, most years. The superintendent of schools in 1901 was Reverend George W. Clough, Baptist Minister, and the teachers in the village school were: Miss Kate Tellier, Miss Nellie Tillotson, Miss Eva Clough, and Mr. Guy Speare, each teaching one of the departments.

The pioneering era of the nineteenth century that attracted settlers to the wilderness of Groton was over. The new "industrial era" was attracting investors, entrepreneurs and workers to the opportunities provided in Groton by the growing population and the

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natural resources of the area. By the end of the first decade in the new century, the kerosene oil street lamps in the village, faithfully tended for many years by George H. Millis, were no longer needed. The first electric lights, installed by Ernest L. Clark and Robert A. Davidson, replaced them in December of 1909. Groton's first telephone exchange started operation in 1905 in the Hatch Block (later named the Welch Apartments). The first telephone in Vermont was reportedly installed in Groton at Vail's Pond (now Seyon) by Theodore N. Vail, President of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, when he owned the property. The plank sidewalks were taken up by 1904 and Groton Village was chartered on April 22, 1907.

Although Groton was attracting new businesses in the early 1900's, farming was still the principal occupation of it's citizens. Most farmers specialized in dairying or poultry, and many in both. All butter was made on the farm until the local creamery, located by the iron bridge on the powder spring road, opened in 1905. Butter, eggs and dressed poultry were supplied to the local market and the larger producers

also shipped their wares to Boston. Maple syrup and sugar production was a spring ritual on almost every farm, with the larger producers hanging up to a couple of thousand sap buckets. Other farm products included beef, pork, potatoes and beans. In addition to supplying their own needs, farmers earned income to purchase equipment and supplies they couldn't make or provide themselves.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, which was organized in 1828 and erected the church building in 1838, had 155 members and twenty probationers at the turn of the century. Pastors during the first decade were Reverend William R. Mather in 1900, Rev. Milo Eddy in 1907, and Rev. P. A. Smith in 1909. Pastors of the village church also held afternoon services at the six-year-old Methodist Episcopal Church building in Westville. The Freewill Baptist Church, which was organized in 1813 and erected the church building in 1866, had a membership of 108 as the new century began. The pastor, Reverend George W. Clough, was recalled to Groton on May 1, 1899, after

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having served here thirteen years earlier.

Groton citizens were active in a number of service organizations. St. Andrews Benevolent Society was incorporated in 1892 by special act of the Vermont legislature with its Home Office in Groton. Mortuary and disability expenses were provided by a benevolent call equitably apportioned among the members according to age. Dr. George B. Hatch was the general manager. The Knights of Pythias instituted Caledonia Lodge, No. 15 on October 1, 1895 and had a membership of more than 80 as the century began. Unity Lodge, No. 66 was instituted at Groton in November 1900 by the International Order of Odd Fellows with 20 charter members which soon doubled in number. Laurel Temple No. 4, Rathbone Sisters was instituted in February 1901 and soon had more than 60 members. Groton Camp 8514, Modern Woodmen of America was started during the decade. And on May 1, 1909 the Order of Patrons of Husbandry organized the Groton Grange Number 443 .

COMMENTS SOUGHT

Additions, corrections, comments and suggestions to improve the accuracy and content of the article reviewing the first decade of Groton History in the twentieth century will be welcome. Addendum can be published in future newsletters.

Watch for the review of the second decade - 1910 through 1919. Send any suggestions for events and people that should be included to the Groton Historical Society, attention editor.

Volunteers to write reviews of the other decades in the twentieth century will be appreciated. If you don't want to write the whole article, just send in the information about people and events that you would like to have included. If you have an interesting story about people and events in and around Groton why not share it with others interested in the history of our town?

WANTED

NEW MEMBERS

Annual dues are only \$5.00 and there is no joining fee. Come to the next meeting and help preserve the history of old Groton for the next generation. Anyone not able to attend meetings can send their dues to the Groton Historical Society, P.O. Box 89, Groton, VT 05046.

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Groton, VT 05046-0209



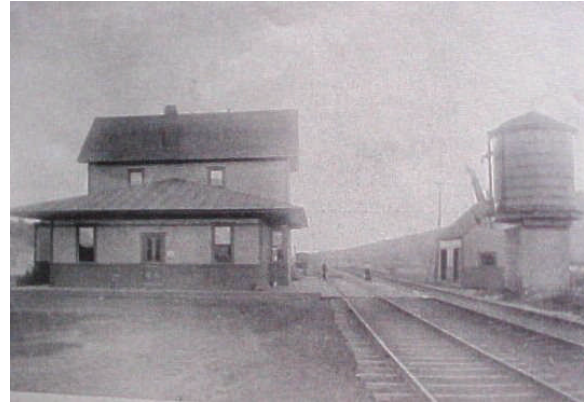
SOME GROTON SCENES IN THE 'AUGHT YEARS 1900 - 1909



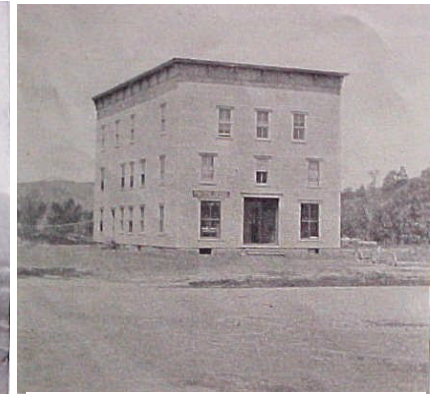
Village school house



Coffrin Block



M.&W.R. R.R. Depot Groton, Vermont



Hatch Block



J. R. Darling's Store



Weed's Hotel



Charles A. Ricker's biggest barn in town



A. M. Heath's Meat Market



Hall & Cochrane Store



Mrs. G. H. Pillsbury's Store



Dunnett's summer home at the Pond



I. M. Ricker's Residence

These pictures are from *The Groton Times - Groton and Ryegate Vermont 1901* special edition reporting on the people and their activities at the turn of the century. It also includes photos of many prominent people and a copy is in the collection at the Groton Historical Society.