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# GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Volume 17 Issue 2

Groton, Vermont 05046

Spring 2004

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## REVIEW OF GROTON IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY DELAYED



A bequest from the late Norma Hosmer helped get the Historical House repainted and ready for Open House on Sunday afternoons in July and August— 2 to 4 PM .

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*The final episode of life in Groton in the twentieth century from 1990 to 1999 will be in a future issue of the newsletter. An **incomplete** in History is better than failing it completely.*  
*Editor*

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### CULTURAL HISTORY WEEKEND

The State of Vermont has declared August 14 & 15, 2004 as Vermont Cultural History Weekend.

The Vermont State Parks at Groton State Forest will help celebrate this event and they have invited the Groton Historical Society to prepare a display and provide a speaker to tell about the history of Groton at the Nature Center & Museum.

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### MEETING SCHEDULE

(second Tuesday)

March through November  
10 AM at the Peter Paul House,  
253 Scott Hwy.

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## Rob Miller Mill at Groton Pond

(from memories by Charles Lord, probably in the late 1900's)

In 1875 the Groton Pond Lumber Co. built a mill, boarding house and tenant house about a half mile up from the outlet of the lake; the mill being run by steam instead of water power. A branch railroad was run from the main line of the Montpelier and Wells River to this location and a railroad station, post office and store were added. In 1883 a forest fire wiped out the whole plant, but it was rebuilt the same year. The operation was taken over by A. Baldwin of Wells River and L. Hazen of St. Johnsbury, and run until depletion of timber on their lots in 1892.

Rob Miller went to work for Michael Goslant as clerk and surveyor in 1896 shortly after graduation from Albany Business College. In 1902 in partnership with V. E. Ayer of Barre, they formed the Miller-Ayer Lumber Company and bought 9,000 acres from Goslant. The previous mill at Groton Pond had been destroyed by fire resulting from a boiler explosion which killed one man, and one of the boilers landed across the pond from the mill.

Hollis Lund of Groton, a millwright and expert carpenter worked on building of the new mill. The

other buildings from former operations were intact and in good shape. These included the blacksmith shop, a storage shed, a barn, the boarding house, two dwelling houses and the station house.

Mr. Lund worked from early summer 1903 to about May 1, 1904 on building the new mill which commenced operation immediately. The new mill was a two story structure with the boilers, engines, shafting, etc. on the ground floor and the saws, etc. on the second floor. The logs were pulled up out of the pond by power on what is known as a wet slip. The sawed lumber was loaded on hand cars in the mill and pushed over rails, out of doors, on elevated runways adjacent to the siding tracks, stacked and dried and then loaded into cars. Freshly sawn green lumber was hardly ever loaded directly from mill to car. Generally, hardwood logs were hauled over the ice and snow to the slip and sawed then, and the softwood logs were mostly towed down the pond from the "log pile" at the north end of the pond by a small

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## GROTON CENSUS TRANSCRIBED

Groton census records from 1790 to 1930 have been transcribed and are available to view or download on the GHS web page. Some of the names were hard to decipher and any errors or omissions that are noted should be reported to the Society so corrections can be made.

The first six censuses (1790 to 1840) only recorded the names of heads of families and the number of people in the family by sex and various age groups. They were separated by "Free White Persons", "Other Free Persons" and "Slaves". All Groton families were in the first category except the family of John Phelps in 1800. His family had one 'free white female' and seven 'other free persons', presumably John and six children. *Mr. Glover's Groton* states on page 36 "General Hill says that Phelps was of African blood..".

The last nine censuses (1850 to 1930) included the names of all family members.

## NOTES FROM THE MINUTES

Norma Hosmer left a bequest in her will to be used for genealogical research, preserving historical items and upkeep on the building.

The old Brown's Meat Market is now Brown's Market Bistro, owned and operated by Mr. & Mrs. Patrick Shattuck. Improvements have been made to both the Market and the Morrison house next door.

Plans are well underway on the Groton Revitalization Project. A hearing was held in June on the grant proposal to the state. A favorable response will get work started by this fall.

The Society purchased paint and volunteers painted the Gazebo (see p. 7).

Open House will be from 2 to 4 pm each Sunday in July and August. Josephine and Bing have prepared the house for showing to visitors.

### GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY WEB PAGE

<http://homepages.together.net/~jdresser/GrotonHistSoc.html>



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tug boat and sawed in the summer.

There were several lumber camps, one at the north end or head of the pond and one on Cold Brook, about 3 miles from the pond and near the west end of the Bog which was known by some as the “French Camp” as most of the workers were French Canadians. Mrs. Peggy Beamis, who with her husband, Herbert, cooked at this camp from Nov. 1923 to early Jan. 1924 and then moved down to the camp at the north end of the pond. Apparently they cut trees in the early winter and then as the snow got deeper they concentrated mostly on hauling the logs down Cold Brook to the “Log Pile”. According to Mrs. Beamis, there were as many as 26 men at the camp, mostly French Canadians. (Denerie Vigneault—woods boss—was one of them; also Denerie Bergeron, both could speak English). She says they had everything to cook as Rob Miller was very good about supplying nice food such as beef butts and baked beans on Sunday—also ham, roast pork and pork chops, eggs and lots of salt pork. She made ten loaves of bread every day plus a large cake every other day and donuts and pies on alternate days. Also they had a

pig and a cow at the camp.

For breakfast they had boiled salt pork and warmed up potatoes plus coffee, etc. Also they had salt pork when they carried their dinners. Apparently, the men liked salt pork as it kept them warm and didn’t freeze so hard that it could not be eaten cold. Most of the men did their wash on Sunday and cut up their tobacco as they brought their own leaf with them from Canada.

After she (Mrs. Beamis), Herbert, and small son Stub moved to the head of the pond camp, the men carried their lunch, using a ten quart pail for every four men. She always had baked beans for Sunday meal.

Life in the lumber camp, while demanding and arduous, was not without its happier moments—for instance, at Christmas time Mrs. Beamis and her husband made popcorn balls for the men, which they appreciated very much. They also fixed some onions, but none of the men ate them, so the Beamis’ froze them and

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ate them later on.

While at the camp at the head of the pond, which was bigger than the “French Camp”, after supper they would invite Denerie Vigneault (woods boss) to play cards with them in the kitchen. Denerie would bring a different man each time, so that eventually most all of the men had a chance to play. These men could not speak English, so Denerie translated for them and all had an enjoyable time.

Towards the end of the season some men had left, so there was extra room, and Denerie asked if his brothers from Winooski could visit them over a weekend and bring something to drink. The men had worked hard all winter with nothing to drink, for Rob had said at the beginning of the season that there would be no drinking. Anyway, Herbert told them as long as they behaved themselves he wouldn't tell Rob. The brothers brought 4 pints of whiskey and outside of Denerie's younger brother (only 16) getting drunk and passing out and finally being revived by numerous doses of black coffee, there were no incidents of note. They all got to feeling pretty good and whooped it up a bit—about 3:00

am Sunday morning, Herbert told them it was time for bed. Next day being Sunday, they slept most of the day and Monday the brothers snowshoed down across the pond and took the train back to Winooski.

The men worked hard and a full nine hour day was put in. I doubt if there were any coffee breaks, etc. However, they were well fed and had a good warm place to sleep. Pay was from \$25.00 to \$35.00 per month, and keep, for the average worker. Sundays, especially in the early part of the season, some of the men would walk down to the main boarding house and mill and bring back groceries, mail, etc. a round trip of 5-6 miles. This was before the pond froze up solid enough to support a team and while the pond was still open they would get in a large supply of groceries that would keep, such as flour, sugar, bacon, ham, etc. So by getting the heavier stuff in by water, the men wouldn't have much to carry back to camp. Herbert was with them one Sunday when they walked down to the mill boarding house and Rob, seeing their light loads, thought that they weren't getting

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enough to eat, so Herbert told Rob to ask the men and then he explained how they had gotten in a lot by boat before freeze up. Rob said, “smart fellow” and laughed.

A stout boy with one white horse was assigned to skidding logs one day and he was struck in the face by the spring pole tightener and quite severely injured; however, on the 3rd day, he was back to work—they sure were tough. That was the only accident they had at this camp all winter, which was an excellent record.

At camp in the evenings one little fellow in his late 20’s had a violin, and he seemed to know just one tune. We used to get a bit tired of that one piece with the men keeping time with their feet, however, the men enjoyed it and he generally didn’t play much except on Sundays.

There were numbers of workers especially the Portuguese and French Canadian, who must remain nameless, but all worked hard for Rob because they liked him and he was fair to them.

As with the French Canadians, there were numbers of the Portuguese who could speak lit-

tle or no English. They had a spokesman or leader, Tony Silva, who came year after year. The Portuguese were employed mostly in the mill, mill yard and log pile—they had nothing to do with the cutting of timber, etc. I remember of two families staying at the head of the pond lumber camp in the summer, the men working at the log pile rolling the logs into water and making up the rafts or booms of logs for the steamer to take to the mill. These men were often in the water up to their waists and in early summer the water was cold. My sister and I used to play on the sandy beach with two children of these families. These children were about our age—ten to twelve years old. They were nice kids and could speak English.

Many hours I have spent in and around the mill area and the station house. We would arrive by train and carry our baggage down the road which was filled in with sawdust in spots, generally stopping at the water tub opposite the old schoolhouse. There was a gate across the road near the station which kept the live stock from straying onto the tracks and there was a side gate for foot traffic. We always very conscient-

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The Gazebo in Veterans Park was recently repainted by Groton Historical Society volunteers—Deane and Bing Page, Josephine French, Dick Kreis, David and Joan Chase, Sue Gordon, Dale Brown and Spicer, Main. Good job, it looks great, thanks.

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tiously closed these gates if we used them. I was fascinated by the powerful steam engine when in operation—also listening to the steady pulsating exhaust was intriguing to a 12 to 14 year old. I remember going upstairs and watching the sawing of logs. At the barn we sometimes stopped to get fresh milk practically from the cow. The boarding house had an appeal of its own, especially the store and small post office. In back of the counter on the walls hung axes,

cross-cut saws, and woodsman's tools. There was even candy to be bought—the two items I remember were the assorted paper wrapped kisses, and a miniature sauce pan with a tiny spoon to ladle out the filling in the pan. It was nearly a mile from the station to where we embarked by water for our camp at the extreme northern end of the pond. In the summer there were generally cows and horses grazing alongside the road. It must

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have been rather poor picking for the animals for the cleared surfaces were covered with stones.

Austin Lund relates that when he lived at Groton Pond in the station house (his father Hollis Lund worked on building the new Mill) he and other children went to school in Groton commuting by train each day. At that time, 1903-1904, the old sawdust pile was still burning and the children were warned never to go near this area, as every now and then it would cave in where it had burned underneath. The old sawdust pile burned for several years—at least 7 or 8.

The new mill had a 125 h.p. steam engine plus a smaller 25 h.p. which ran the generator for electric lights. He says the day they started the generator his dad took his mother and the children to see the electric lights in the boiler room. The first such lights he had ever seen and probably would apply to his mother and dad. Later on a 35 h.p. engine was installed to operate the band saws which sawed out chair stock.

Austin says that they lived on the second floor of the station house. The first floor although vacant at that time was equipped with store counters and also in the

past a post office evidently had been there. At that time all mail for Groton Pond was delivered to Ricker's Mill Post Office and had to be gotten there. From September 1903 until early December 1903, he carried the mail during the week, getting off the train at Ricker's, picking up the mail and walking the track to Groton Pond. Rob gave him 10 cents a day for this chore.

W. J. Bushey notes that he worked for Rob from Dec. 1921 until Dec. 1924, most of the time in the woods cutting both logs and pulp. He says that from old timers he heard that a man named Cole built the "up and down" sawmill on Cold Brook. (The only name rather vaguely I ever heard it called was the Jack Carpenter Mill). It wasn't much of a mill, as the volume of water at this location is not very great. The stone foundations are still visible and it is about one mile up Cold Brook from the head of the pond. Mrs. Rogers tells me her uncle Almon James of Groton worked in this mill and it was an "up and down" affair—that would make it around 1865 when he worked there. Also Henry Bradley of Peacham says

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that his father worked in this mill about 90 to 100 years ago.

Frank Jones was a teamster around this time (1918-20), and he quite often used 2 to 3 pair of oxen to bring logs from the "French Camp" to the "log pile". Sometimes in the early part of the winter season some of the horses, equipment, etc. would be brought in by a trail on the west or railroad side of the pond that extended all the way from the mill area to the lumber camp at the head of the pond.

Nelson Smith generally worked in the mill and relates that he was working in the mill the last day the board saw operated and they finished up by sawing up the "boom logs" which were used in towing the logs down from the "log pile". This last summer of operation was 1924, although they sawed out chair stock a while longer the same year. He relates that on Sundays during the summer time they used to go swimming using the beach at the Ayer Camp now owned by Doug French of Groton.

My brother Ralph says that the first time he went to the pond from Groton with my father and Frank Perry of Barre around 1900, the station house, the

school house (opposite the water tub), a house on the left or north side, the boarding house, the barn and the blacksmith shop were in existence. The mill itself was gone having burned, as related above. Billy Gay and family lived in one of the houses. He must have been a sort of caretaker. Fishing in the pond and brooks was very good. No trouble in catching a meal of fish.

He worked for Rob Miller during the summers of 1911-1912 and ran the steamer. Alex Hall of Groton was his room mate and was book keeper and clerk. He says Rob Miller had three different steamers and the one he ran was about 25 feet long, wide beamed and a solid roof. It was powered by a 10 h.p. steam engine, and burned slabs in the vertical boiler. At that time the camp at the head of the pond was run by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lakin of Marshfield. The woods boss and yard boss was Israel Jewett. Mrs. Lakin and Mrs. Jewett were also cooks at the Mill boarding house. A child's sleigh and jumper, which were made by the blacksmith in his spare time, are still in use by grandchildren of Israel Jewett.

Rob Miller built a two tene-

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ment house on the south side of the road near the boarding house. Mr. and Mrs. George Taplin and small daughter Evelyn lived in this house around 1920. Gus Tellier and wife lived here before them. Mrs. Taplin (now Nellie Rogers) worked part time in the boarding house and Mr. Taplin was barn man, steamer operator and general handy man. He worked for Rob, off and on, from 1910 to around 1921. Mrs. Taplin relates how the French-Canadians came as a group by train with their belongings and after reaching the pond by the mill, Mr. Taplin would take them by steamer to the “log pile”. This event occurred in mid November and sometimes there would be a thin layer of ice around the shore line. The crew would then be carted by team to the “French Camp” and would immediately start cutting.

Another time Mrs. Rogers relates that she went with her husband George when he took a load of groceries up across the pond on the ice on a cold day in the winter of 1920-21 to the “log pile” where Frank Jones with 3 yoke of oxen then took their load the rest of the way to the French Camp. Frank Jones mostly drove oxen and he had brought a load of logs down to

the “pile” that day.

In the winter Mr. Taplin’s main job was to get up at 3:30 each morning build fires in 5 stoves at the boarding house, then go to the barn and do the chores, including getting the teams ready for the day. Breakfast at 6 a.m., work day from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. with 1 hour out for lunch, and supper at 5:30 p.m.—no work on Sundays. If a teamster was sick, Rob took his place that day for a team couldn’t stand idle all day. In the summer, Mr. Taplin operated the steamer most of the time. There were 5 or 6 double teams at the barn plus a few cows to care for.

Mrs. Rogers says that Ida McRae was a teacher in the school at Groton Pond—that must have been when the previous mill was in operation. Also Nellie Weed was cook at the “French Camp” during the winter of 1920-21.

She also relates that Mr. Smith of Barre was a silent partner of Mr. Ayer—he was a brother-in-law of Ayer. Mr. Smith built a camp on the pond where the Beaver Dam Brook enters (camp now owned by Doug French). This camp had

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a fireplace, flush toilet, running water and even electric lights supplied by a home generating plant. The stones to build the fireplace were shipped in bags on the railroad and Mr. Taplin drew them down from the station with a stone boat.

After Mrs. Ayer got sick and couldn't be at the Smith camp, Mr. Ayer had a room of his own at the station and he and Rob always ate at the head of the table at the boarding house.

The boarding house, so called, was where the workers in the mill area ate and slept (with the exception of several married men living in the two houses) - it was a large two story building with sleeping quarters on the 2nd floor for 40 men—2 men to a room, and on the first floor there was the kitchen, dining room, a large recreation room called the “bar room” and another room housing the office, store and post office. The “bar room” was a hold over from other operations, as no liquor was ever dispensed here. Rob was very strict about drinking and gambling and as a result these activities were kept at a minimum. As related above, the men did occasionally consume a bit of whisky, but if Rob ever found out, they would have been “going down the road” quickly. As at the logging camps, the men were well fed. The menu consisted of roast pork, boiled and roast beef, fish, beans and salt pork, pies, muffins, biscuits, doughnuts, cake, brown bread, oatmeal, tea, coffee and milk.

Mrs. Rogers quite often worked at the boarding house—she got \$2.50 a day and her husband got \$30.00 a month, a house, fuel, and milk; so all together considering the times, it wasn't too bad.

When the Soules Mill in Plainfield closed down Marvin Boomhower and his family moved to Groton Pond and he worked in the Mill for Rob Miller. At that time there were 100 men employed, 28 teams of horses, 4 lumber camps running in the woods, a large boarding house, a horse and cow barn, a school house, blacksmith shop, several private homes, saw mill and dry house for lumber a very pretty railroad station in which 3 families lived, all part of the bustling lumber concern at Groton Pond, now called Lake Groton. After Miller ceased operations in 1924, Marvin went to work for Harry Ricker and finished out his career as a board sawyer there.

Rob Miller was born March 8, 1870 in West Barnet and died April 4, 1956 in Woodsville.

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