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# GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Volume 19 Issue 3

Groton, Vermont

05046

Summer 2006

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# GROTON'S PIONEERS

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R. B. Abbott GG nephew of James

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### OFFICERS

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Newsletter Editor	Willard Benzie

### Part three: James Abbott

*This is the third in a planned series on the early pioneers in Groton. Articles on Jesse Heath and Aaron Hosmer were in previous issues of the Newsletter.*

**James Abbott** was born in Concord, NH on 18 October 1750, one of 10 children born to James and Sarah (Bancroft) Abbott. He purchased the right of proprietor James Warton in 1782 and settled on what was later surveyed as lot number one in the northeast of Groton Township. At the first recorded proprietors meeting on August 13, 1787 Col. Ira Allen was chosen to layout one hundred acres of land to each proprietor's

*(Continued on page 2)*

### MEETING SCHEDULE

(second Tuesday)

March through November  
10 AM at the Peter Paul House,  
1203 Scott Hwy.

**OPEN Sundays in July 2-4 pm**

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*(Continued from page 1)*

right.

Waldo Glover wrote in *Mr. Glover's Groton* that James Abbott was the first 'permanent' settler in the new town. His conclusion was based on James's "petition for land" found in Volume V of the *Vermont State Papers*, published in 1939, which reads as follows:

*To the Honbl. Generall Assembly  
now Sitting at Newbury*

*the Petition of James Abbot  
Humbly Shewith*

*that your Petitioner in the  
year 1782 Purchased the Possession  
of James Warton which now lies in  
the township of Groton as Since  
Granted*

*that your Petitioner lived  
with his family in sd Town, the only  
Famely for two or three years*

*that he has had  
incouragement both from Mr.  
Butterfield a Principle in Groton  
Grant and also from those who  
claimed his farm under N. York*

*your Petitioner only Prays  
that your Honours would enlarge  
Said Grant of Groton (it being  
neither bounded nor Chartered) So  
that your Petitioner may receive  
Equal Share with other Proprietors  
of Said town your petitioner paying  
the Same fees to this State as the*

*former proprietor has done your  
petitioner as in Deuty bound will  
ever pray*

*Newb'y 15th Octr 1787*

*James Abbot*

In the 1790 census James Abbott is listed as the head of a household of 2 males 16 years of age or older, 3 under 16 years of age, and one female. The two older males were James and probable a hired man, the 3 males under 16 were his sons, John age 7, James age 6, and Jeremiah age 2. The female was James' second wife, Mehitable "Hitty" (Hidden) Abbott.

His first wife, Zelpha (Smith) Abbott, died August 31, 1784, the first recorded death in Groton. She died 6 days after giving birth to their third child, Sarah, on August 25, 1784, the first recorded birth in Groton. James and Zelpha's first two children, Susanna (1782-1783) and John (1783-?) were born in Haverhill, NH. Sarah was not listed in the 1790 or 1800 censuses with the family, so maybe she was living with a relative or someone else. She was only a few days old when her mother died.

The 1800 census lists one

*(Continued on page 3)*

male 45 years of age or older (James age 50), one 16-26 (John age 17), two 10-16 (James age 16 and Jeremiah age 12), two under 10 (Samuel age 9 and Eben age 7), and one female 45 years of age or older (Hitty age 46). Sarah would have been 16, but she was not listed with the family in 1800 either,.

James Abbott was the only pioneer who settled in Groton and signed the Charter in 1789 as a proprietor. In 1788 he was elected Assessor with Archibald McLachlin and Edmund Morse and also chosen to lay out necessary roads in town with Jonathan James, another pioneer settler and James Whitelaw a major property owner at that time.

When Groton was organized in 1797, James Abbott was elected to the board of selectmen. His first home in Groton was a log home, but around 1800 he built a plank house near the Groton-Peacham cemetery. In 1807 he sold the farm to Ephraim Wesson, Jr., brother-in-law of Edmund Morse, and moved to Ohio where he died about 1814 at Portsmouth in Scioto County.

James had 3 children with Zelpha, his first wife; Susanna born in 1782 and died age 1, John born in 1783, and Sarah called Sally born 25 Aug 1784. Sally married Aaron

Bailey in Groton on 4 April 1806 and they raised a family in Woodbury, VT, where they both died; Sally on 25 Aug 1839, and Aaron on 1 Jun 1850.

James had 6 children with his second wife, Hitty; James born in 1786, twin boys born in 1787 and died the same day, Jeremiah born in 1788, Samuel born in 1790, and Eben born in 1792. No other information was found in the Groton Historical Society family records about the family.

James Abbott's family lived in Groton about 25 years, 1782-1807, and they have been recognized as the first settlers to build a 'permanent' dwelling in the new town.

Other Groton families listed in the first census, in addition to Aaron Hosmer and James Abbott, are Israel Bailey, John and Robards Darling, Jonathan James, Edmund Morse, and Timothy Townshend. The families of John Darling and his son, Robards, and his son-in-law Timothy Townshend totaled 21 of the 45 people living here at that time. Future newsletters will report on these families.

## SLEEPING SENTINAL WOUNDED IN BATTLE AT LEES MILL April 16, 1862

*Report of Col. Breed N. Hyde, third Vermont Infantry, of engagement at Lee's Mill, or Burnt Chimneys. Hdqrs. Third Regiment Vermont Volunteers, Camp near Warwick Creek, April 17, 1862. . Taken from Official Records published in 1884.*

Having been ordered to take position yesterday under direction of Captain West, of General Smith's staff, I placed my regiment in the woods to the left of a position taken by Capt. T. P. Mott's battery. Six of my companies were deployed as skirmishers, or as supports, the left of the line on the road leading from Lee's Mill to Yorktown, the right resting in the edge of the woods near Captain Mott's battery. The line of skirmishers was nearly a mile in length. The left of my line in the morning connected with a line of pickets or skirmishers of the Fifth Vermont. The line of the Fifth Vermont was withdrawn during the day without notice to me or Major Seaver, commanding my line of skirmishers, thus leaving the extreme left exposed to a flank movement of the enemy. The four remaining companies were placed near the right of the line of skirmishers.

Between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon I received verbal orders to send two of my companies across the creek, and if possible gain possession



Pvt. William Scott, Company K, Third Vermont Regiment, enlisted 7/10/1861, wounded 4/16/1862 at Lees Mill and died the following day 4/17/1862.

of the enemy's works on our right, with orders to make a signal with a white flag to signify that we were in possession of the works, thus warning our artillery to cease firing. Two companies, D and F, were ordered immediately to carry out this order. Companies E and K were ordered to support this movement, with instructions that reinforcements would follow immediately, which information was

(Continued from page 4)

given under instructions received.

At a little before 3 o'clock I ordered the advance of Companies D and F, Captain Harrington, Company D, commanding, with the support of Companies E and K, Captain Bennett, senior officer, the whole under the command of Captain Harrington. The whole advanced steadily without firing, Companies D and F somewhat deployed, Companies E and K in close order until nearly across the creek (the enemy having from the first moment of advance opened a severe enfilading fire from our left,) when our men opened a telling fire, which drove the enemy from the rifle pits in front. The enemy retired before our steady advance, leaving us in complete possession of the rifle pits in our front, and of an earthwork, say, 300 yards in the rear of them. The ammunition having become useless, our men were soon unable to reply to the enemy advancing with two regiments on our left and one in our front. The enemy's fire telling on our men fearfully, and no supports or signs of re-enforcements making their appearance, though a full statement was sent in due season to headquarters of the brigade, which unfortunately, did not reach the general commanding the brigade, I reluctantly ordered a retreat, which was very reluctantly obeyed. We held the enemy's rifle pits about forty minutes. The whole time from the order of advance to the order for retreat was nearly one hour. The loss to the

four companies engaged, in killed, wounded, and missing, including commissioned officers, is about 75, of which 22 were killed outright. I had 7 men of the other companies wounded during the day's operations.

Very respectfully submitted.

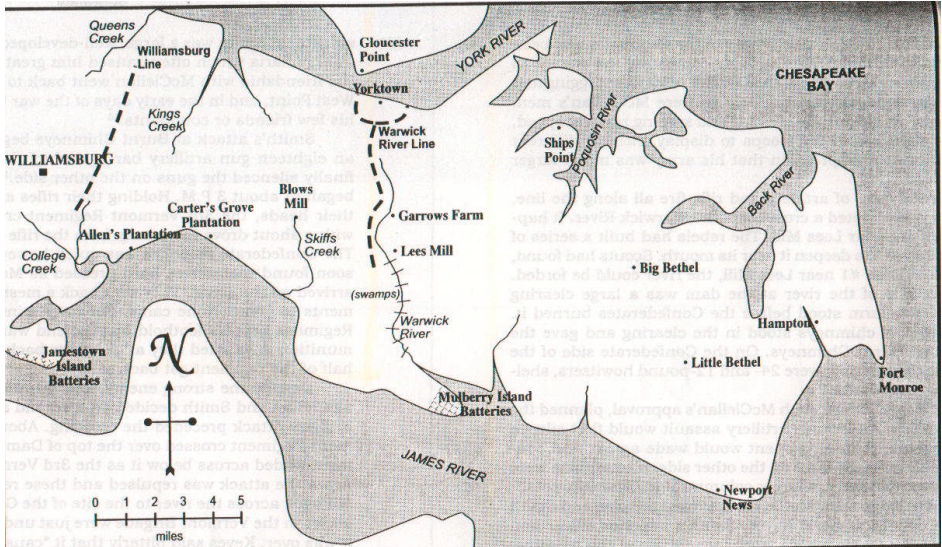
B. N. Hyde

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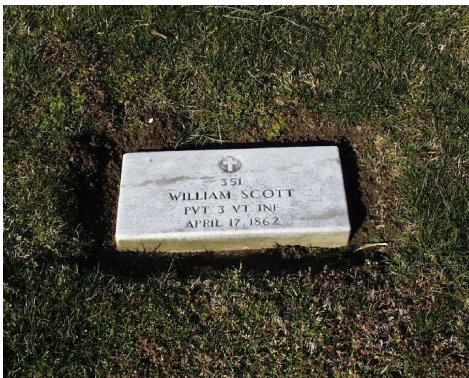
This official report of Col. Breed N. Hyde on the battle at Lees Mill or Burnt Chimneys was researched by Dennis A. Hermann of Swansea, IL and forwarded to Jim Dresser for the Groton Historical Society records. He also sent the excerpt from the book *A PITILESS RAIN: The Battle of Williamsburg, 1862* by Earl C. Hastings, Jr. and David S. Hastings which is printed on pages 8 & 9 and provides additional information about the battle in which Pvt. William Scott was mortally wounded.

Dennis Hermann is writing an article about William Scott the sleeping sentinel who was pardoned by President Abraham Lincoln after he was sentenced to be shot by a firing squad for sleeping on guard duty. He was standing guard duty a second consecutive night in relief of a sick comrade when caught sleeping and was sentenced to die by firing squad at his court-martial. President Abraham Lincoln interceded and spared the young soldier's life.

## William Scott, the Sleeping Sentinel



Map of Civil War defense lines on the Peninsula by the authors of **A PITILESS RAIN—The battle of Williamsburg, 1862**, E. C. & D. S. Hastings. Pvt. William Scott, *The Sleeping Sentinel*, from Groton, VT was wounded in battle near Lee's Mill on April 16, 1862 and died the following day. He is buried in Yorktown National Cemetery in grave 265 of Division B. See story on p. 8.

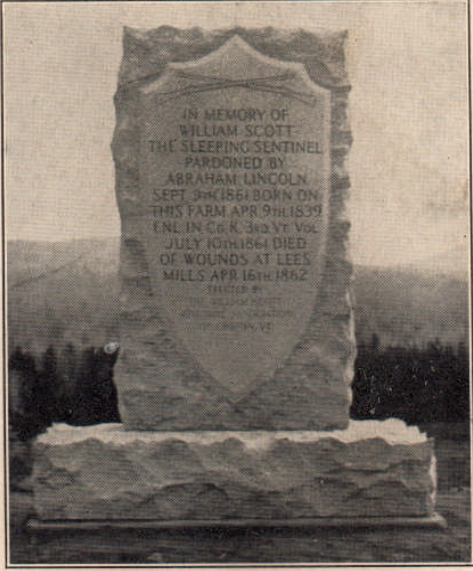


William Scott's grave marker in the Yorktown National Cemetery courtesy of Dennis Hermann.



Allen Carter one of the 79 Civil War veterans listed in Mr. Glover's Groton. Groton suffered 29 casualties in the Civil War, including William Scott

**William Scott Memorial**  
GROTON, VERMONT

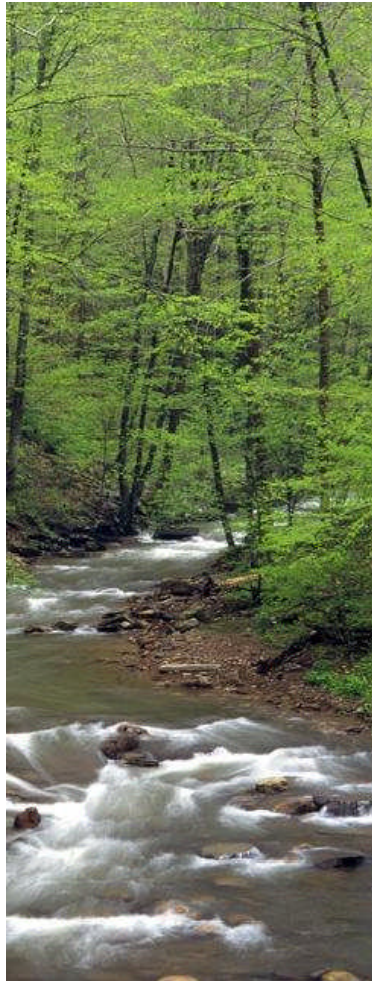


IN MEMORY OF  
WILLIAM SCOTT  
THE SLEEPING SENTINEL  
PARDONED BY  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
SEPT. 9th 1864 BORN ON  
THIS FARM APR. 9th 1839  
ENL. IN CO. K. 3rd Vt. Inf.  
JULY 10th 1864 DIED  
OF WOUNDS AT LEES  
MILLS APR. 16th 1862  
SIGNED BY  
WILLIAM SCOTT  
GROTON, VERMONT

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J. W. MAIN, Groton, Vermont  
Tel. 43-13 P. O. Box 25



William Scott Memorial on U. S. Highway 302 in West Groton, Vermont near his home site. The monument was manufactured in Groton by J. W. Main, and dedicated by the William Scott Memorial Committee at a ceremony in 1936. Through efforts of the committee, U. S. Route 302 from the junction of U.S. 2 in Montpelier to the Vermont-New Hampshire border in Wells River was named the *William Scott Memorial Highway*, by the Vermont Legislature in 1945.

Bubbling streams of fresh spring water from the forested hills of Groton fill the lakes and rivers on their way to the Wells River, Connecticut River, and the Atlantic Ocean to evaporate and provide the precipitation that recharges the streams for a continuous flow of cool clear water-recycling naturally.

**Excerpt from: A PITILESS RAIN: The Battle of Williamsburg, 1862**  
**By Earl C. Hastings, Jr. and David S. Hastings (p. 20-21)**

Meanwhile Magruder's small Army of the Peninsula had been slowly growing in numbers and strongly contesting the enemy all along the line. Around Yorktown, the Confederates were digging and building fortifications just as furiously as were McClellan's men. Along the length of the line, the shelling and sniping rarely stopped, as Magruder maneuvered his troops to display them at different points to produce the impression that his army was much larger than it was.

After several days of artillery and rifle fire all along the line, the Union Army attempted a crossing of the Warwick River. It happened on April 16, near Lees Mill. The rebels had built a series of dams across the river to deepen it near its mouth. Scouts had found, however, that at Dam #1 near Lees Mill, the river could be forded. On the Union side of the river at the dam was a large clearing where the Garrow farm stood before the Confederates burned it. Now, three smoked chimneys stood in the clearing and gave the battle the name Burnt Chimneys. On the Confederate side of the river, opposite the clearing, were 24- and 12-pound howitzers, sheltered in three earthworks.

General "Baldy" Smith, with McClellan's approval, planned the crossing operation. An intense artillery assault would first silence the

opposing guns, then a regiment would wade across and conduct a reconnaissance-in-force on the other side. If conditions were found to be favorable there, a larger column could be sent to establish a permanent lodgment. McClellan approved the plan and Smith arranged the details. General Keyes, Smith's superior officer and commander of the Corps whose troops would make the crossing, was never consulted.

General McClellan's antagonism towards his corps commanders seemed particularly directed toward General Keyes. Years after the war, Keyes wrote that he knew that McClellan was against him, and that "he never once asked my advice or opinion in regard to any battle or movement, nor did he once call me to council with the other corps commanders." The battle at Burnt Chimneys is a striking example of this mismanagement, for it was exclusively planned by McClellan and Smith. General Keyes was opposed to operation and noted that, "If my opinion had been asked by the General-in-Chief it would have been given decidedly in opposition."

Smith chose the Vermont Brigade of his division to make the crossing. Smith was a Vermonter himself and had earlier commanded

*(Continued on page 9)*



*(Continued from page 8)*

the 3rd Regiment which would spearhead the attack. At West Point seventeen years earlier Smith had acquired the nickname "Baldy" because his hair was somewhat thin for a young cadet of his age. Now, although he still had ample hair for a man of 38, the nickname still stuck. Smith was a large, well-developed man, but he suffered from malaria which often caused him great pain and depression. His friendship with McClellan went back to their days together at West Point, and in the early days of the war he seemed to be one of his few friends or confidants.

Smith's attack at Burnt Chimneys began well, starting with an eighteen gun artillery barrage which lasted all morning and finally silenced the guns on the other side. The infantry assault began at about 3 P.M. Holding their rifles and ammunition above their heads, the 3rd Vermont Regiment crossed under fire, and with a shout drove the enemy from the rifle pits on the other side. The Confederate response was quick however, and the attackers soon found themselves hard pressed as McLaws' reinforcements arrived on the scene. They sent back a message for the other regiments to come. None came. For forty minutes the 3rd Vermont Regiment kept its foothold but the end was inevitable. With ammunition exhausted they at last drew back across the river. Only half of the regiment got back safely.

Despite the strong enemy concentration now opposite them McClellan and Smith decided on a second attempt. Again a fierce artillery attack preceded the crossing. About 5 P.M. the 4th Vermont Regiment crossed over the top of Dam #1 while the 6th Regiment waded across below it as the 3rd Vermont had done earlier. Again the attack was repulsed and these regiments also began to fall back across the river to the site of the Garrow farm. The total losses in the Vermont Brigade were just under two hundred. When it was over, Keyes said bitterly that it "caused a heavy loss on our side in killed and wounded, and no benefit whatsoever." Magruder reported his losses as seventy-five.

As the days passed and the rains fell on the miserable armies below, McClellan's siege dragged on and official Washington badgered him to move faster. Stanton did send some good news however by releasing Major General William Franklin's 8,000 man division from McDowell's Corps to join McClellan at Yorktown. When these troops arrived on April 22, McClellan held them at Ships Point below Yorktown, preparing for a dash up the river to West Point as soon as passage up the river was cleared.

For the young soldiers of both armies who had enlisted to fight in righteous combat, the siege of Yorktown was a bitter disappointment indeed.

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## WHERE A SMALL TOWN IS LIKE A LARGE FAMILY

The signs greeting visitors to Groton have special meaning to anyone researching their family history. Many, perhaps most, people in the Groton Historical Society Family Records can be found in several different families. This fact led the Society to make one family computer file called "GrotonVT", so an individual would have to be entered only once and could be linked to as many families as needed.

Thinking of family connections brought to mind the words of a song from several years ago: *I'm my own Grandpa*. They went like this:

Many, many years ago when I was twenty-three,  
I was married to a widow who was pretty as could be.  
This widow had a grownup daughter who had hair of red.  
My father fell in love with her, and soon they, too, were wed.

This made my Dad my son-in-law and really changed my life.  
For now my daughter was my Mother, 'cause she was my Father's wife.  
And to complicate the matter, even though it brought me joy,  
I soon became the father of a bouncing baby boy.

My little baby then became a brother-in-law to Dad,  
And so became my uncle, though it made me very sad,  
For if he were my uncle, then that also made him brother,



Of the widow's grownup daughter,  
who of course was my stepmother.

Father's wife then had a son who kept them on the run,  
And he became my Grandchild, for he was my daughter's son.  
My wife is now my mother's mother, and it makes me blue,  
Because although she is my wife, she's my Grandmother too.

Now if my wife is my Grandmother, then I'm her grandchild,  
And every time I think of it, it nearly drives me wild,  
"Cause now I have become the strangest case you ever saw,  
As husband of my grandmother, I am my own grandpa.

I'm my own grandpa,  
I'm my own grandpa,  
It sounds funny, I know  
But it really is so,  
I'm my own grandpa.

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**“ALL WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR ITSELF”**<sup>FDR</sup>

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The quote from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech about the four freedoms came to mind the other day when I went to mail a package and was asked for identification. Identification is required, according to the clerk, to assure safety from terrorists. Apparently terrorists don't have identification.

The heightened security and lack of 'TRUST' that has permeated our society since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 indicates to me that FEAR is getting a grip on us and we need to guard against letting it control our lives. Being cautious and alert to dangers is good, but being afraid and losing trust of people is bad.

All we have to fear is fear itself, so be alert, be smart, and

be trusting of people and guard yourself against pessimism and losing your freedoms to fear. Be optimistic and appreciate the good things in life, don't fear the things you can't control, but work to improve the things you can, so all people will enjoy freedom and trust of their fellow citizens..

During world war II, fear caused some people to become suspicious of U. S. citizens with ancestry from Axis countries like Germany, Italy, Finland, and Japan, and often these citizens were unjustly discriminated against because of this fear.

The coin of the Realm is inscribed with the words "In God we trust", but even this trust is challenged by some in today's world.

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**MEMBERSHIP UPDATE as of 06-13-06**

Members in good standing (paid 2006 dues) since the Spring Newsletter: Melvin Benzie, Lorraine Carpenter, Ina Corthell, Kent Haskell, Bob Herdman, Dot & Spicer Main, Bing & Deane Page, Clara Puffer, Harold & Janet Puffer, and Barry Smith.

Reinstated members: Barbara Crown, Elaine Fiske, Bob & Virginia Jennings and Robert Somaini.

New members: Elizabeth Durovich.

**NOTICE: 2007 Dues are \$10; Membership Cards are discontinued**



Can you help identify the people in this photo and guess the date it was taken? This was the home of Susan (Burnham) Hall; I. N. Hall; Frank Downs; Louise (Downs) Parker [widow of Sewell Carpenter and Ernest Parker]; Ernest Lyons; Wilson & Evelyn (Whitehill) Shields; and is now the home of Jim & Janet Dresser.

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Groton, VT 05046-0089



Signs by Harold Puffer welcome people to the town of Groton, VT