
GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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GROTON HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER PLANTS: 1908-1931



Home of Ernest F Clark (1883-1923)

BY Terry Reilly (1945 – 2019)

Terry Rielly researched the story of Groton Electric for GHS but didn't get it completed before his death. This story is revised and edited from his draft, notes and correspondence. He was interested in the history of the electric power generating plant located near his Grandmother's home where he spent some of his childhood playing in sections of the abandoned penstock used to carry water from the dam on the Wells river located downstream near Lorimer Puffer ball field, under the old iron bridge to the brick powerhouse in Hall field.

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Green Mountain Power Corp. officially abandoned all rights and easements in connection with the Upper Groton No, 13 Hydroelectric Power Generating Plant (1916 – 1931) on 21 December 1944. These rights, including diversion rights, penstock rights, and easements, were recorded in the following instruments in the Land Records at Groton Town Clerk's Office and copies were provided by Green Mountain Power:

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

Grantor	Date	Book	Page
John F. Hatch & T. B. Hall	29 Apr 1911	15	74
Ora & Isabel Thurston	27 Jul 1911	15	85
Hiram Daniels	3 Nov 1911	15	142
Thomas B. & Isaac N. Hall	30 Mar 1912	16	58
J. E. & Mary Page	14 Jan 1914	14	296
Fred Harris	14 Jan 1916	14	318
I. N. & T. B. Hall	14 Jan 1916	14	294
F. D. & Carrie McCrillis	14 Jan 1916	14	290
M. C. Page	14 Jan 1916	14	289
A. H. Frost	17 Jan 1916	14	293
Jennie Blanchard	31 Jan 1916	14	292
Fred & Virginia Frost & C. A. Ricker	25 Sep 1929	17	632

They also abandoned all rights and easements in connection with the Lower Groton No. 12 Hydroelectric Power Generating Plant (1908 – 1927) on the same date.

S. N. & Bernard S. Eastman	5 May 1908	14	183
S. N. & Bernard S. Eastman	1 Aug 1911	15	127
Helen J. Heath	18 Jan 1916	16	507
A. E. & Myrtie E. Legare	8 Apr 1916	14	295
B. J. B. Renfrew	8 Apr 1916	14	297

The parcel of land and the Groton Electric Company's brick power station (GMP #13) located on the so-called Thomas Taisey meadow, now in the name of Thomas B. Hall and I. N. Hall, was quitclaimed to David Hall of Groton, Caledonia Co., VT for one dollar and other valuable consideration on 6 March 1947 by Green Mountain Power Corporation. These premises were part of those conveyed by Groton Electric Company to Eastern Vermont Public Utilities Corporation (EVPUC) on 25 April 1916 and by EVPUC to Peoples Hydro Electric Vermont Corporation 17 Nov 1927.

This was the closing chapter of hydroelectric power generating plants in Groton. Started by Ernest F. Clark (1883-1923) and Robert A. Davidson (1879-1968) who formed a partnership in 1904 and built the first hydroelectric generating plant in Groton behind the Baptist Church. Electric lights replaced the kerosene lamps lighting Groton village streets by December of 1909, one hundred ten years ago. This cement powerhouse on the Wells river provided electricity to the businesses and homes in the eastern part of the village.

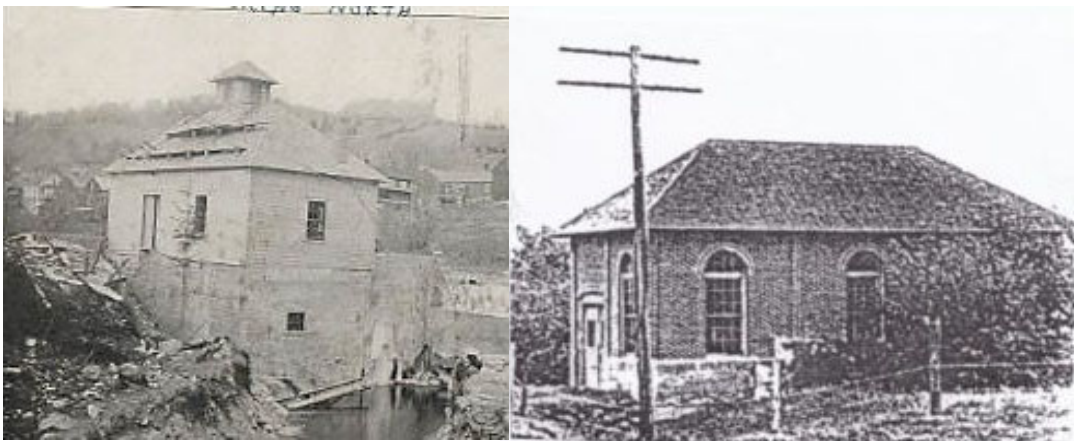
The partnership was incorporated as Groton Electric Co. a few years later and built the brick powerhouse upstream in the western part of the village providing electricity to the businesses and homes in that area. By 1916 with two power plants up and running ownership was transferred to Eastern Vermont Public Utilities Corporation, which was managed by Ernest F. Clark in 1923 at the time of his death.

In 1927 Groton and the whole state of Vermont was devastated by a severe flood that washed away bridges and damaged homes and businesses along the rivers and streams. The cement powerhouse behind the Baptist Church was damaged beyond repair and the brick powerhouse on Hall Meadow was severely damaged.

Struggling smaller companies were taken over by larger ones and ownership of Groton's hydroelectric plants and distribution lines became part of Peoples Hydro Electric Vermont Corporation on 17 November 1927. Although the lower Groton power plant was inoperative, the upper one continued to produce power until 1931 when it was closed.

Peoples Hydro Electric Vermont Corporation was one of the electric companies acquired by Green Mountain Power that closed the brick powerhouse on the Wells river in Hall meadow, ending hydroelectric power generation in Groton. Electricity produced elsewhere was then supplied to Groton village by Green Mountain Power Corp.

Many farms had their own wind powered generators charging storage batteries to supply direct current electricity to the home and barn before Washington Electric Coop. provided electric power to the farms in 1939 under the Rural Electrification Act (REA) passed by Congress during recovery from the Great Depression of the 1930's.



Hydro Electric Power generating plants in Groton: left behind Baptist Church and right on the Hall Meadow below the bridge over U. S. 302.

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY IN GROTON AND SURROUNDING AREA

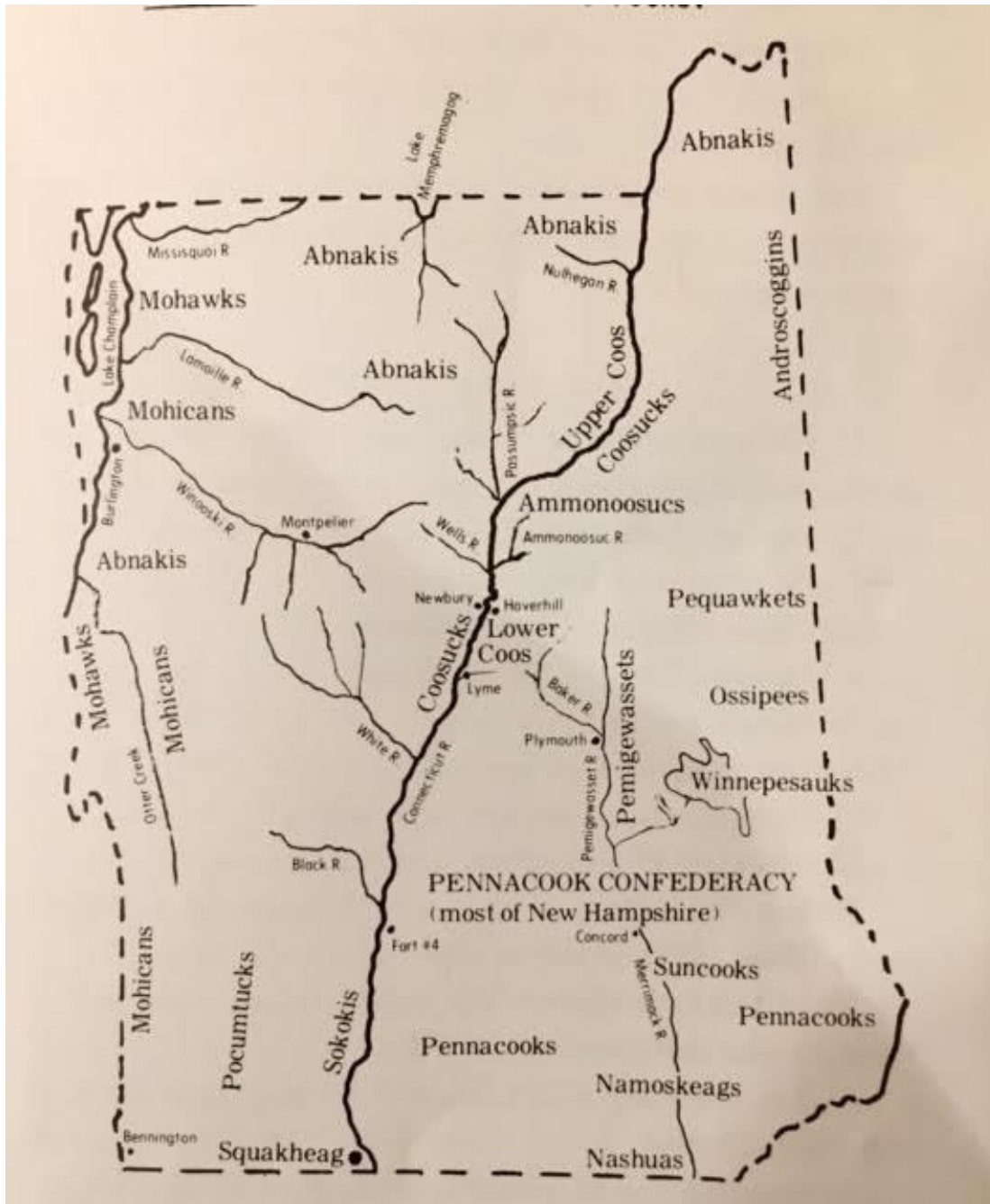
Phil Coutu

Phil Coutu presented a program at the Groton Historical Society on the Native American history in Groton and the surrounding area on 19 September 2019. It was a very interesting story and well attended by the members and guests.

Little evidence of settlement in Groton but travel routes and overnight camping sites were scattered throughout the area. Travel was generally along water routes with canoes or on foot beside the rivers, streams and lakes.

Phil displayed maps showing the areas of the various Native American tribes that travelled and camped in Groton and the surrounding area.





Map of areas occupied by Native American Tribes in what is now Vermont and New Hampshire before European settlement of New England.

JAMES SHIELDS 1857-1940

Carol (Welch) Shields

It was on the eastern slope of Harvey's then, in Mosquitoville, a picturesque little farming community with mailbox after mailbox all bearing one name, "Shields".

James Shields, a sturdy Scotsman with piercing blue eyes and a substantial mustache purchased the original farm from Ed Manchester in 1885 and there with his bride, Martha Morrison settled down to raise their family of eleven.

Much of the 120 acres still had to be cleared, but the hard work and long hours of toil only served to strengthen the strong family ties. There was never any thought of moving a daughter Verna recalled, "It was home and we all loved it."

Their lives were bounded up in the farm, the nearby one-room school, and at the bottom of the long hill, the unadorned Walter Harvey Meetinghouse.

Elwyn was the first to leave home. For months he had coveted the prim maple-shaded farmhouse next door and an attractively shy Peacham girl, Annie Killiam. By the summer of 1922, he possessed both.

The nostalgia of Harvey's tugged at Virgil's heartstrings too. In April 1938, unable to resist any longer, he and Agnes Wilson and their family of seven moved to the next farm down the road, with its breathtaking view of the three ponds in the valley far below backdropped by the distant White Mountains.

After James died in 1940, Ellsworth the youngest son, took over the family farm; like his Dad before him thinking the home he was born in, a perfect place to spend a lifetime with Evelyn Macombie and their eight offspring.

Olive too, felt the homeward tug, and with a teacher's instinct, a splash of red and yellow, a big bow window, and lots of daylilies, the long-abandoned schoolhouse became a perfect summer retirement cottage.

I first visited the Shields neighborhood in 1960 and was captivated by the tranquil farmlands, its green pastures dissected by dusty gravel roads; impressed by the warmth and charm of the friendly Scottish farm folks.

It was a lasting impression, one that added five more great-grandchildren to James Shields family tree.

GROTON H. S. ALL-CLASS REUNION 2019

On June 29th about 85 classmates and guests gathered at the Happy Hour Restaurant in Wells River for a luncheon and to reminisce about the “good old days” at Groton High School and catch up on what is happening in the lives of their classmates..

The oldest class represented was the class of 1935 by Dr. H. Gordon Page at the age of 100. That was the only class represented from the 1930’s. The 1940’s had six classmates attending: Wallace Hood, 1945; Madeline (Darling) Dana and Willard Benzie, 1946; Theresa (Cassady) Shepard 1947; Deane Page 1948; and Vilma (Gandin) Wright 1949. Most of the attendees were from the 1950 and 1960 classes.

Groton High School graduated 44 classes between the time it was reestablished after World War I and when it closed in 1967. The first class to graduate was in 1923 and the last one in 1967. Students then attended other schools until Blue Mountain Union School opened in the fall of 1970.

More classes of Groton students have graduated from BMU than graduated from Groton High School between 1923 and 1967. And including the seven classes that graduated earlier from 1903 to 1909 a total of 51 classes graduated from Groton High School.

Perhaps it is time for BMU to have reunions and include the students from Groton and Wells River High Schools that combined with Ryegate to form Blue Mountain Union school district.

Pictures of some attendees at the Groton All Class reunion taken by Lois Boemig, co-chair of this years committee, are on pages 8 and 9 in the newsletter. The planning committee did an excellent job in organizing a nice meal and Jolley entertainment. A good time was enjoyed by all.

PICTURES FROM THE 2019 GHS REUNION



1935 Dr. Gordon Page & daughter with the Jolley entertainers.



1945 Wallace Hood



1946 Willard Benzie
1949 Vilma (Gandin) Wright



1953 Juelle (Eastman) Lambertson &
Laura "Bing" (Avery) Page



1955 Doreen (Batchelder) White, Ruth
(Crown) Wilson & Janet (Benzie) Puffer



1960 Dick & Priscilla (Clark) Sherburne

Taken by Lois (White) Boemig



1961 Beatrice (Smith) Davis, Alton Ricker, & Sharon (Morrison) Stumpf



1961 Sylvia (McAllister) & William Smedy



1961 George & Norma (Murray) Murphy



1963 Ralph Orr, Butch Gandin, Leila & Archie Glidden



1965 Patricia (Lakin) Page & Myrtie (Legare) Beck



1967 Jim and Zoa (Darling) Downing

HISTORY OF SEYON LODGE STATE PARK

By Lise Shallberg

Groton's first summer vacation home was built in 1895 by David Richardson, Editor of the *Davenport Democrat* Newspaper in Iowa. He purchased the hill north of Groton Village and named it Mt. Medad for the former owner – Medad Welch. Mr. Richardson was born and raised in Orange, VT and married Janette Darling of Groton, sister of Judge Jonathan Darling.

Judge Darling built a sawmill, boarding house and a mill pond, known as Darling Pond, at the foot of Clough meadow about 1890 for his logging and lumbering operations in Harris Gore. In 1898 he sold the business to Senator S. L. Griffith known as the Lumber King of Vermont. Senator Griffith died in 1903 and much of his 50,000 acres of timberland was purchased for the Green Mountain National Forest

But in 1910 Theodore N. Vail, President of American Telephone and Telegraph (ATT), purchased 200 acres surrounding Darling Pond. He bought the pond because of its reputation as an excellent habitat for native brook trout and used it as a fishing camp for himself and his business acquaintances. He renamed it Vail Pond.

Sometime after Mr. Vail died in 1920, the Pond was sold to Mr. Robert Peckett, owner of a summer and winter resort in Sugar Hill, NH, where he entertained many famous Americans.

Between 1929 and 1933 Mr. Harry K. Noyes, Master Distributer of Buicks for all New England, purchased the property. He renamed the pond by reversing NOYES to SEYON, and called the house "Seyon Trout Ranch". Mr. Noyes built a huge concrete dam and a building for a 20-foot water wheel and generator. He also repaired the house and installed steel I-beams to support a large living and kitchen area.

In 1955 Mr. Arland Robitzer of Pennsylvania became disillusioned with city life and sold his wholesale beer business to look for a new investment opportunity. "Love at first sight" he said, was our feelings about Seyon. For \$45,000.00 they got a 65-acre lake, 11 buildings and furnishings and 3,436 acres of partially logged woodland.

Arriving at Groton in late March they met the realtor in his new Packard. Their caravan included a stake truck, tractor trailer and car. All vehicles got bogged down in the snow and mud and had to be rescued by combined efforts of a nearby farmer with a tractor and the local road agent with a bulldozer.

During their first night all hell broke loose. They experienced 40 to 50 mile an hour winds funneling between the hills and lake shaking the house and rocking the beds. Another surprise awaited them next morning

22 inches of fresh snow.

The Robitzer family was using the old wooden wall telephone put in by Theodore Vail during his ownership. Seyon had one of the first telephones in Groton. A private line meandering for several miles tacked from tree to tree. Their telephone number was 39 ring 2.

They were soon introduced to ‘Beavers’ with several mounds of homes in the shallower coves. Following the feeder streams, they discovered the entire watershed, an area of several square miles, was full of beaver ponds, some as large as an acre and 6 to 8 feet deep.

They were told beavers became extinct in Vermont in the 1920’s as trapping laws for them were inadequate. In 1930 Harry Noyes brought a dozen pair of beavers from New Brunswick and released them in the lake. Their descendants became so numerous they were a problem. The Robitzer family hoped to use the pond and the trout as a source of income.

During their first summer, Mr. Robitzer realized water flow to the pond was so sluggish and warm it drove the trout to deeper pools. He pulled the dams apart but found the beavers repaired them by the next morning. With help from Cliff Darling, Groton Road Agent, they set out to dynamite the dams. Both became ill several times inhaling too many nitroglycerine fumes. By twilight they had blown up all the dams. They never really conquered the beavers, but kept them from rebuilding in the feeder streams.

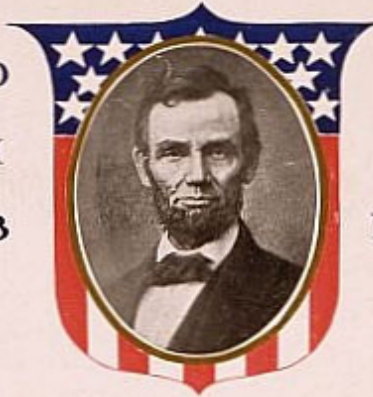
The Robitzer’s established a high-quality sleeping and eating fishing camp for a dozen paying quests. They kept the area quiet and peaceful by not allowing motors on the pond. Seyon Lodge was also a hunting camp, for bird and deer hunting. But eventually they found logging was their best source of income, learning by trial and error before it was successful.

The Seyon experience involved considerable adjustment. They arrived in Groton as outsiders and resented by local people who didn’t want changes forced on them and didn’t want to give up fishing and hunting on the property. After 15 years at Seyon, encountering many problems, including water escaping through the emergency sluiceway, increasing growth of water weeds, and a town reappraisal increasing taxes by 150 percent, along with Mr. Robitzer’s early signs of cardiac issues, and their children with other interests, they decided to sell.

In 1967 it was sold to the State of Vermont with a stipulation that it was to be protected from commercialization or development, and remain forever wild. It is now Seyon Lodge State Park and is open to the public for fly fishing. Mary Jo Llewellyn is currently in the process of writing a “Preservation Plan” for Seyon Pond.

THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

DELIVERED
BY
ABRAHAM
LINCOLN
NOV. 19 1863



AT THE
DEDICATION
SERVICES
ON THE
BATTLE FIELD

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. ★ ★ ★ Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. ★ ★ We are met on a great battle-field of that war. ★ We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. ★ ★ It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. ★ ★ But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. ★ The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. ★ ★ It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; ★ that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

IN MEMORIAM
Terrance Paul Rielly 1945—2019

Terrence “Terry” Rielly, 74 passed away Saturday, August 31, 2019 at the SECU Hospice in Smithfield. He was born July 3, 1945, to Peter Joseph Reilly and Mildred (Frost) Reilly in Barre, Vermont. Terry graduated June 14, 1963 from Groton High School and entered the U. S. Army on June 28, 1963 where he rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant. After serving in Korea and Vietnam, Terry was a Service Writer for Royal Dodge in Fayetteville, NC. Later he received his electrical trade certificate from Fayetteville Technical Institute and worked for King Electric of Fayetteville and David Electric of Greenville, SC. He was dedicated to helping others and in February 1970 joined the West area Volunteer Fire Department on Rosehill Road and came up through the ranks to become Fire Chief and served in that position for 13 years. He stepped down in 2009 when he suffered a stroke and heart attack. Terry also went to work as a civil service employee in June 1983 with the Fort Bragg Fire Department and retired in February 2008. During his career, Terry belonged to the following associations, Cumberland County Fire Chiefs Association and served as both Treasurer and Secretary. The North Carolina State Fireman’s Association. The North Carolina Fire Chief’s Association. The International Association of Fire Chiefs, the American Legion and a Life Member of the DAV. He was preceded in death by his wife, Susie Rielly and a sister, Linda Bailey. Surviving are his step-daughter, Sherry Kareiva ; step-son, Lloyd “Jr” Bogert; son, Robert F. Rielly; granddaughter, Samantha McLamore, Tiffany House, Shaun Frisby, Shandon Kareiva, Candace Bogert and Paris Bogert; a special daughter-in-law, Charlotte Blanton; sisters, Kathy Reilly, Sandee Rutherford and Marci Thibodeau, great granddaughter, Bailey House; and the mother of his son, Katherine J. Rielly. A memorial service will be held Monday, September 16, 2019 at 6 p.m. at Balm in Gilead Christian Center, 3110 Doc Bennett Rd. Fayetteville, N.C. 28306 with the Dr. Vivian V. Rhone officiating. In lieu of flowers memorials may be made to the Alzheimer's Association. Funeral arrangements by Jernigan-Warren Funeral Home, 545 Ramsey St. Fayetteville, N.C. 28301.

GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Visit GHS on the internet

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Web page: grotonvthistory.org

Facebook@[grotonvthistory](https://www.facebook.com/grotonvthistory)

HIGHLIGHTS OF August 13th MEETING

The Seyon Pond Program by Lise Shallberg was well attended and very enjoyable. She told how the trout pond was coveted and protected by wealthy businessmen until it was sold to the state in 1967 (see story p. 10).

A new handicap access has been completed for the PPH and will be available for those attending meetings and special events such as programs and open house on Fall Foliage Day.



HIGHLIGHTS OF September 3rd MEETING

Phil Coutu presented a program on Native Americans travelling and camping in Groton and surrounding areas. It was a very interesting and well attended presentation (see story p 4).

Damage from decay on front of the Peter Paul house is considerable. An estimate for repair and painting of the damages by Groton contractor Matt Nunn for \$12,000 was approved. Plans are to complete the north and east sides of the building in 2020.

The "Memoirs of John White" written about 1955 for Jackie and Lois White were discussed by Allen Goodine and a copy from GHS files will be edited and published. It will include his recollections of Groton in the first half of the 20th century plus a few pictures from the photo album at the PPH by George Millis. A copy of the publication will be used as a thank you gift for donations to maintain the PPH and additional copies will be offered for sale.

2020 calendars will be for sale this year showing the work of several Groton artists as well as pictures both historical and artistic featuring photos of early members of the GHS..



Victorian Lady's Undergarments will be exhibited at PPH on Fall Foliage Day by Phyllis Burke featuring items recently donated to GHS by Kelly Wood and her mother, Delores Hamlett, along with others from the GHS clothing collection.

Erik Volk and Phil Coutu are moving to Monroe NH this fall. Phyllis Burke and Lise Shallberg. will assume duties of the Secretary position and Deborah Jurist will assume management of the website and membership . A temporary treasurer will be needed until the next election of officers. .

The Vermont History Museum has an exhibit of Norman Rockwell's "Arlington: America's Home Town" through January 2020 in Montpelier. The exhibit chronicles Rockwell and the other artists who lived in Arlington, as well as the many local residents who posed for the scenes of everyday life that was portrayed.

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