
GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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Winter 2021

PILGRIMS FIRST WINTER



Pilgrims at Plimouth Plantation
winter of 1620—1621 illustrated

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In recognition of the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims arriving on the Mayflower and establishing the first permanent English settlement in New England this story is about their first winter at Plimouth Plantation in 1621. ed

The first work crew left the Mayflower on December 25th to begin building at Plymouth. Most of the original settlers didn't celebrate Christmas because they thought the holiday was invented by the Roman Catholic Church.

First building was a Common House which would have several huts around it. Then there would be living quarters built for the settlers. There would be a total of 19 lots.

Because of the hardships that the settlers had to endure in the coming months, the Common House had to be used as living quarters and a hospital. Construction of the Common House alone was held up because of weather conditions.

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Just as the construction of the Common House began, a storm came along which featured snow that changed to rain. During the next three weeks, there were a number of storms that moved through while producing rain, snow, and sleet.

Many settlers lived on the Mayflower and left the ship to work until March when more dwellings were constructed in earnest.

From all historical accounts, weather conditions from late December to mid-February were quite “checkered”. Bradford reported a severe cold spell in early to mid-January, where a number of colonists died and another similar period in early to mid- February. Bradford described most of the rest of the winter as windy with frequent periods of rain. After the cold spell, weather conditions turned mild for the rest of the winter season and into the spring. In later years, other original settlers wrote about how mild the first winter was compared to subsequent winters.

Despite eventual milder weather, 45 of the 102 colonists died during the first winter 17 fatalities in February alone. Many succumbed to the elements, malnutrition, and diseases such as scurvy. Frequently two or three died on the same day. Four entire families perished and there was only one family that didn’t lose at least one member.

Of the 18 married women, 13 died. Only three of 13 children perished, probably because mothers were giving their share of food to the children.

There has been much written about the interaction of the Pilgrims and the natives. The Native Americans knew about Europeans from contact with explorers and fishermen. Many of those interactions were not amicable.

Native Americans knew that the Pilgrims had established a settlement but were wary of any interaction, so they kept an eye on them without any contact during that first winter. That all changed in March.

Samoset was from the Sagamore Tribe of Maine. He had learned some English from fishermen and trappers and came to the Plymouth settlement to welcome the Pilgrims on March 16, 1621.

Samoset told the Pilgrims about a tribal leader, Indian Chief Massasoit, and they also learned about Squanto, who had survived a recent epidemic in the area.

Those three Native Americans came to the settlement made a peace pact with the Pilgrims, for mutual defense. Squanto spoke good English as he had lived in Europe for some years. He became a “liaison” between the native people and the Pilgrims. The natives taught the Pilgrims how to grow food like corn.

The first “Thanksgiving” was actually a harvest celebration. It was an annual celebration for the Native Americans held every October. So, the event actually occurred nearly a year after the Pilgrims first landed.

There is no record of the weather during that celebration and the actual details are part legend and part folklore. Since it was October, weather conditions were probably mild.

Weather History (The Early 1600’s)

This period of time was known as the “Little Ice Age”. It wasn’t really an ice age but it was a cycle of very cold winters that lasted for a few centuries after a significant warming period during Medieval times.

The period from 1600 to 1620 was quite cold in Europe, especially in the winter. This was during the “Little Ice Age” period. Interestingly, most of these winters were very cold but dry, so the Pilgrims were not unfamiliar with the cold. Being exposed constantly to the elements and dealing with diseases and not eating properly all contributed to the sickness and death that prevailed during their first winter in the “New World”.

After the harrowing ordeal of the first winter, the Pilgrim colony began to grow, slowly at first and then more rapidly as more settlers arrived in the area.

By May of 1627, the population of the Plymouth Colony was up to 156. In January 1630 it was nearly 300 and by 1643 it was up to around 2,000.

Credit Wikipedia

REMEMBERING BOX DINNER SOCIALS

J. Willard Benzie

Nowadays when someone mentions box dinners most people think of popping a prepared meal into the microwave and getting a quick lunch. But I am remembering the box dinners from the 1930's before microwaves arrived and social distancing was an oxymoron. A Box Dinner Social Auction and Dance was a fund raiser for country groups to pay for maintenance, repairs, and improvements to their facilities. Instead of charging admission to the dance, each couple brought a meal for two in a shoe box and they were auctioned off to raise funds.

In my memory I am rescuing from the dust bin of history some of the box dinner socials at the Westville School House. My Mother's first teaching job was at the Westville School in 1925 and perhaps that is why we had such a fond memory of the school and their fund raising activities after she married my Dad and took an absence from teaching school to raise six children.

Those were the days of dances on Saturday nights with live music from local musicians who would get a group together, like Henry Ashford, Lester Freer, Dave White, and many others. Periodically the school would have a box dinner social before the dance. The ladies prepared a meal for two and put it in a decorated shoe box that was auctioned off to the highest bidder. Sometimes the gentlemen would get the one their partner prepared, but more often not.

On special occasions like Valentines Day, the single girls would secretly describe their decorated box to their boyfriend who would try and get it so they could eat together. Often when the bidding started his friends tried to help him out and raised the bid to see how high he would go. Sometimes he would start bidding on other boxes before his girlfriends came up and then stop to let others get it just to eliminate the competition when hers did come up for auction.

Wikipedia describes box socials as a tradition in the U.S. state of Vermont where women decorate a cardboard box and fill it with a lunch or dinner for two. The men bid on the women's boxes anticipating a meal with the woman whose box it is. Generally, the boxes are anonymous, so the men do not know which woman belongs to which box, nor what the box contains, the mystery and sometimes humorous results add to the fun. However, it is not unknown for a young woman to drop hints to a favored man. The bidding involves teasing, joking, and competition. The event frequently takes place in a town hall, school gymnasium, or church hall. A notable example is from the second act of the musical Oklahoma!, which is set at a box social.

FRED TUTTLE—A MAN WITH A PLAN

John O'Brien's *Man With A Plan* (1996) movie launched Fred Tuttle into the news bigtime.

O'Brien, an unknown 35-year-old filmmaker, was living on a sheep farm in Tunbridge, VT. The plot was a combination of political film and existential comedy. An elderly dairy farmer, in dire need of health care challenges a long-time incumbent for a seat in the US House – and wins by a single vote.

To play the aging dairy farmer O'Brien recruited his 77-year-old neighbor, an unknown and aging Tunbridge farmer named Frederick Herman Tuttle. In *Fred Tuttle*, O'Brien found a star arguably more charismatic than Robert Redford, and arguably less comprehensible than Chauncey Gardiner. At five feet tall and with a Vermont accent a good inch thick, perpetually in bib overalls, thick glasses, and blue feed cap, Fred shuffled through every scene exactly like an arthritic dairy farmer who'd stumbled somehow onto a real live movie shoot, and still couldn't quite believe his luck. He quickly became endeared to audiences around the state.

But as much as the film and its star, it was the ingenious roll-out of *Man With A Plan* that elevated it to cult status. Cryptic "Spread Fred" stickers appeared on bumpers around the state. O'Brien scripted it very consciously as a faux political campaign, with Fred marching in Labor Day parades and attending the Governor's press conferences, where he was asked about the issue at hand. It was impossible to tell if Fred was just acting or not; he'd played himself in *Man With A Plan*, and he was clearly himself now – loveable and befuddled, but always with an answer to a political question, both shorter and stranger than the reporter had any right to hope.

O'Brien was no stranger to Vermont politics – his father had been a State Senator from Orange County, and a one-time candidate for Governor – and he knew precisely how and when to put his star on the political calendar as 1997 gave way to 1998.

By September, Fred's name popped up as a write-in candidate on primary ballots across the state. O'Brien began to consider taking his strategy to the next level: running Fred as a candidate in an actual race. As Fred had run against a longtime Congressman in *Man With A Plan*, his first thought was to enter the upcoming House race against Independent Bernie Sanders.

For Fred to be the Vermont hero, there had to be a real villain –

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preferably one from out of state.

Jack McMullen, a Republican businessman who had a ski chalet in VT but worked in Massachusetts, had moved to Vermont about a year before, renting an apartment in Burlington to establish residency, and had his sights on Pat Leahy's Senate seat. Although he was on the boards of seven different companies, he seemed to know relatively little about the state as a whole.

The Leahy camp had attacked McMullen before O'Brien even began to consider the race. Carolyn Dwyer, Campaign Manager, puts it in polite terms: "We did what good campaigns do: we did our research, then identified and labeled [McMullen] before he had a chance to introduce himself. So we started talking to the press [before Fred entered the primary]."

While there never was coordination during the primary, both Leahy and Tuttle campaigns were giving similar messages, and the combined effect was rapid and powerful. Editorial cartoons began to target McMullen's brief Vermont residency

Fred's celebrity gained momentum. McMullen successfully argued Fred's petition was 23 shy of needed 500 signatures. Fred (and O'Brien) responded with an additional 2,300. During the primaries the spending gap grew more and more ludicrous, and less and less important: McMullen spent \$500,000 to Fred's roughly \$200 (one of O'Brien's best acts was a nickel-a-plate fundraiser for Fred – with four cents for seniors).

Challenged by a TV reporter for promoting an unqualified candidate and making a mockery of serious political business, O'Brien responded with "Both candidates are tremendously unqualified. It's a mockery of a mockery."

McMullen tried desperately to involve Leahy. "I can't prove it, but I strongly believe Pat Leahy is an active participant in this joke," he said to the Washington Post. But Leahy was not about to let McMullen get him involved and "vehemently" denied the accusation.

The death blow came on the eve of the primary, during a much-anticipated Vermont Public Radio debate. The unusual format was for each candidate to ask the other a series of questions. O'Brien carefully considered questions for Fred to ask. "We spent most of the day trying to figure out what Fred could ask Jack – and actually get something out of it. And the questions we came up with went so much better than expected."

Asked to read a list of Vermont towns, McMullen mangled several by applying French pronunciation. And asked to quantify the working anatomy of a cow, McMullen's mind seemed to shut down altogether under the cumulative weight of the campaign's absurdity.

It was a career-ending performance for McMullen. And despite the

denials of involvement or concern, no one was more gleeful than the Leahyites. The daily skewering of the self-funding Republican – by a protest candidate who hinted broadly that he didn't actually much want to go to Washington – was a wish come true.

In politics, you need to be extremely careful what you wish for. Leahy and advisors listened to the debate as well, and between times of laughter were moments of real puzzlement – not so much about the questions and answers, but the bizarre convolutions their political world was clearly undergoing.

When the results were in on election night, it was clear that Fred – for whatever reasons – had honest staying power at the ballot box: he defeated McMullen going away, 54% to 44%. (It helped greatly, of course, that Vermont was an open primary, in which, as the Washington Post put it, “Democrats can cross over and vote on the Republican ticket, if they're so moved by a particular candidate – or moved against one.”) Man With A Plan had become on-the-ground political history.

And of course, Leahy and his campaign team knew that in a certain very real sense their competition wasn't a slow-moving dairy farmer who'd only finished the tenth grade by the skin of his teeth. Their real opponent was a very shrewd, thirty-something Harvard graduate with an ability to blend fiction, film and Vermont political reality in ways that were proving amazingly popular. Someone a lot like a younger version of Leahy himself.

Voters allowed Fred's candidacy to succeed because they were in love with Fred Tuttle, and they loved to hate Jack McMullen, but also because they didn't mind the thought of Pat Leahy getting a bye to a fifth term in the U. S. Senate. (The Burlington Free Press, which spent the final month of the election alternately cooing Tuttle and bemoaning the lack of a credible opponent, finally reported: “When a Senator wins a fifth term uncontested, it is in part a signal of a broad public trust. Vermont is confident in Leahy.”)

The trouble was – and here was the final layer of emotion – Leahy felt instinctively that there was real live danger in treating the election as a bye. He'd been burned in enough campaigns to understand that the unexpected would always have its way; there was nothing to say that his own defeat couldn't or wouldn't be the climactic end of the still-expanding Fred Tuttle phenomenon.

This is the Pat and Fred show, a campaign that's not a contest, starring a Republican candidate who wants his opponent to win. Leahy lived up to his unspoken agreement to promote Fred for everything but the US Senate .

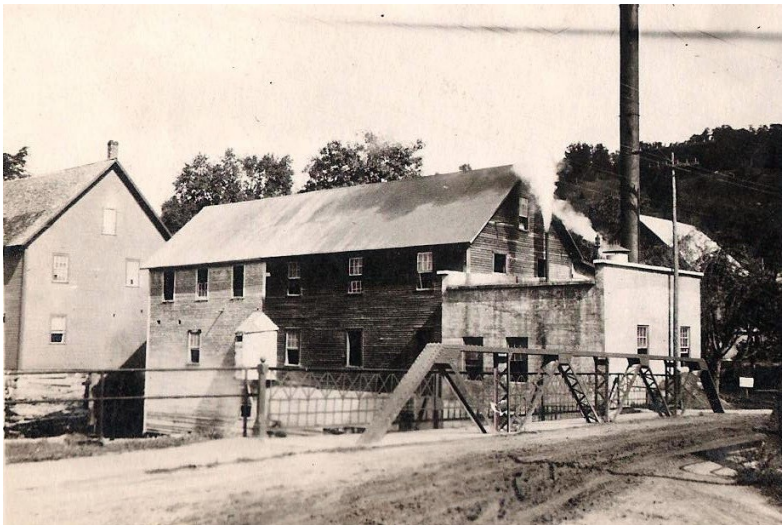
Editor's note: Condensed from chapter in Phil Baruth's biography of Sen. Patrick Leahy recounting the 1998 race with Fred Tuttle. .

1920 PICTURES ALONG THE WELLS RIVER

Photos by Captain D. A. Smith



Grist Mill on Mill Street by west dam



Groton Turning Works by bridge on Powder Spring road



Hydro Electric Generating Plant behind Baptist Church



Ice Skating on the Wells River above the dam

MAYFLOWER MOTHERS

Everyone has heard of the Pilgrim Fathers. Doughty, God-fearing souls who sailed to America on the Mayflower to create a world where they could follow their religious beliefs without fear of persecution.

But what makes the voyage remarkable are the mothers, the unsung heroes who sailed alongside their men on the momentous enterprise which began in July 400 years ago.

There were 18 women and ten took their children with them. Incredibly, given the tumultuous adventure they were about to undertake, three were pregnant and another breast feeding her infant. Just as startling, there were more than 30 children and youngsters under 21 years old on the ship.

As for the men - the husbands, single men and servants - they totaled 50 in all and were actually outnumbered by the women and their offspring.

That the role of women in the story is scarcely acknowledged is perhaps unsurprising given that 17th century females invariably owed their status and identity to their men folk. Unsurprising too, that the accounts of the historic voyage are by men about the men, not least by William Bradford, who became governor of the new settlement in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

He did, however, acknowledge that the 'weak bodies of women' might not withstand the rigors of the journey though he could not foresee just how deadly the undertaking would be.

The arrangement was for the self-styled pilgrims to sail on the Speedwell from Holland where they had lived in exile from English persecution for 12 years and rendezvous with the Mayflower in Southampton. The Mayflower, meanwhile, left Rotherhithe, London, carrying 65 fortune seekers who had financed the expedition and hoped to recoup their investment by making their riches from the flourishing New England beaver trade. The two groups were to sail convoy across the Atlantic but the Speedwell became as 'leakie as a sieve' and was abandoned in Plymouth, Devon, at which point many of the pilgrims joined the crowded Mayflower.

The ship, which had been used for the cross-Channel wine trade, now had 102 passengers thrust in the stink of the hold, forced to endure the lack of hygiene, the smell of unwashed bodies and the grime of filthy clothes.

Privacy was impossible. To relieve themselves the voyagers had to balance precariously on the ship's bowsprit but in storms

they stayed below decks and used chamber pots which were sent flying across the cabins when the waves hit and the winds rose.

As for food; a diet of salt meat, peas, hard tack biscuits which became infested with weevils and to drink, beer. No wonder the hold became a breeding ground for lice and scurvy.

Not until the Mayflower dropped anchor off Cape Cod on November 11, 1620 - more than 100 days since leaving Southampton - were the women, at last, able to step on to land and wash their clothes 'as they were in great need.'

Remarkably only one of their number died on the voyage but two soon followed after making land and a few weeks later Bradford's wife Dorothy fell from the ship's deck into the chill waters of the bay. Her body was never found. Strangely, Bradford records the death only in the appendix to his writings with a terse: 'Mrs Bradford died soon after their arrival.'

Was he as indifferent as he seems? She was only 16 when they married and he 23 and she had been compelled to leave their three-year-old boy behind. Was she so desolate at being separated from him that she committed suicide? In truth, no one knows what happened that bleak winter's day.

But what time could there be for private grief when cold, disease and hunger took away half the settlers in the first three months after landing? As they struggled to hew a settlement in the wilderness they were too enfeebled to resist scurvy - first the symptoms of putrefying ulcers and bleeding gums, then diarrhea, fever and death.

The women suffered a far higher percentage of fatalities than the men or children. Only four mothers survived the first winter, not so much because of their 'weak bodies' but because the men were out in the fresh - if freezing - air, building their new homes, while the women were confined on the Mayflower for a further four months. In those close confines the disease spread quickly, especially as the women exposed themselves to danger caring for the sick and dying.

The death toll was remorseless. Of the pregnant trio who set sail, Elizabeth Hopkins, gave birth to baby boy Oceanus in mid-Atlantic, adding to the three children who sailed with her. Mary Allerton, who already had three children under seven, suffered a still-born birth and died within days. Sarah Eaton, who had been breast feeding her son, also perished, leaving the infant to be brought up by her husband.

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And, as if in affirmation that among the saintly there are trouble makers, Eleanor Billington, who had two rowdy boys and years later witnessed the execution of her husband for murder, became notorious for her sharp tongue and was found guilty of slander, strapped in the stocks and whipped.

Perhaps no survivor had a more harrowing experience than Susanna White. Soon after the arrival she had a son named Peregrine - the first child born in the new world and a brother to her five-year-old son. Her happiness was short lived for within weeks her husband William died. Yet on May 12, eleven weeks later, she married fellow passenger Edward Winslow, a leading light in the movement, who himself had been widowed as recently as March 24.

Widowhood and remarriage were routine in those days of shortened life expectancy - of the 13 couples on the voyage four were second marriages - but this surely was no love match. Instead, they accepted that they had to sacrifice their own feelings for the good of the settlement which needed children to survive. Susanna had three boys and a girl. Her duty was done.

Of the four mothers left alive Mary Brewster, who at 52 was the matriarch of the new community, brought two of her four children. She was typical of a female who played a major part in the saga but is fleetingly mentioned while her husband William was - quite rightly - lionised as a pilgrim hero. But how much did he owe to the woman who supported him when they fled persecution in England in 1608 and through the years of exile in Holland? We are not told.

It was the generation of younger women who helped ensure the colony lived on. Six girls were orphaned in the first deadly winter and two were to marry fellow passengers. Their names, Elizabeth Tilley and Priscilla Mullins, are unknown to all but the most familiar with the Mayflower story but they had ten children each and their resilience and hard work were essential to the prospering of the settlement. Although there were other marriages and many more children, their legacy lives on in their descendants which include six US presidents.

All told 30 million US citizens can trace their heritage back to the Pilgrim Mothers.

Voices of the Mayflower by Richard Holledge

Of all the books commemorating the anniversary few will have the human insight of this, in which Holledge brings the voyage to life with an account that is not quite fact but not completely fiction either. The best history is told though individual stories.

Groton Historical Society News

Meeting September 8, 2020

Socially distancing in the sunny and quiet back yard of the Peter Paul House, 4:00 p.m. Present: President Deborah Jurist, Vice-President Brent Smith, Treasurer Susan Pelkey Smith, Corresponding Secretary Lise Shallberg, Mark Shallberg, Recording Secretary Phyllis Burke, Tonya Palmer, Allen Goodine

Deborah distributed minutes of June 9 meeting, 8/31/2020 treasurer's report, draft letter to mail with newsletter, and meeting agenda.

Minutes of last meeting:

Allen moved to accept, Lise seconded . Motion approved.

Treasurer's report: Susan explained the format. 2020 income to date: \$4600.39; expenses: \$6174.72; checking acct. balance: \$4392.06. The bill for mowing not yet received, insurance bill is due 9/23. QuickBooks is used to bill membership dues. Net revenue from puzzles is \$1802.45.

Phyllis moved, Allen seconded to accept treasurer's report. Approved.

New puzzle: Lise reported Nicole Wolfgang's original artwork is ready for Kent who manufactures the puzzles in Waterbury .She and Mark will deliver it tomorrow. They will ask about turn-around time.

Questions considered: Number to order? How to sell? Include shipping cost in price of puzzle? Open house this fall to sell puzzles and books?

Alan: Do we have ways to contact folks who bought the first puzzle?

Lise: We have email & physical addresses.

Deborah: Let's buy 200 puzzles. We need to order more books, too.

Lise: Puzzle set-up fee is \$26.00. Must order multiples of 12. Kent has dropped price to \$9.00 each. A \$6.00 shipping fee should cover cost.

Discussion followed about how many to order, whether or not to ship all or some, whether to include shipping fee with price. Agreed if there is a price savings for larger orders, to order 200. If not, go with 108.

Deborah: Form to record sales, Lise gives to Susan with payments.

Allen: explain need to ship because of COVID and winter driving.

Agreed to ship all orders instead of delivering, no matter where.

Susan: Wait to reorder spring (first) puzzles when they're gone.

Fall event. Should we have one? An open house or just tables outside to sell books and puzzles? We discussed the pros and cons of opening the Peter Paul House this fall, uncertainty about the weather, the risk from COVID, and decided not to have a fall event.

Book and puzzle promotion and sales. Deborah has been working on the project to reprint Marion Lindsay Proudfoot's *Camping at the Pond*. It is now in Word, ready to be checked. Allen and Phyllis took copies to proofread. Allen suggested someday doing an addendum, with contribu-

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tions from people who were at the lake in the '50s and '60s.

Allen discussed ways to sell more of Seth Eastman's Civil War book. Find contacts for folks with Civil War interest? Better description of the books on our website? Deborah will talk to Mike Gaiss about that.

Deborah's draft of a newsletter insert, with a form for ordering the books and the new puzzle, and pricing for members was reviewed. Susan suggested having the same pricing for everyone, member or not.

Advertising and selling? Deborah will put the information on our Facebook page and a link on "Square." She will re-write the insert, distribute via email for our response, and will do the mailing this week. Tonya and Susan can help.

Painting & repair of Peter Paul House and maintenance of collections. We need another \$6000 for painting the south and west sides of the house next summer. Everyone agreed that Matt Nunn did a great job with the north and east sides, and with replacing the kitchen door.

Lise has been cleaning the house, has organized the "office", and especially the contents of the filing cabinet. Great job, Lise! Allen has offered to go through the boxes in the office to check unidentified photos and for duplication of documents.

Thanks to Brent for installing an outside faucet on the west wall, for ease of watering plants.

Phyllis is working on the clothing, and has donated a stand for displaying the quilts.

Susan asked who has keys to the house: Deborah, Brent, Lise, and Phyllis.

Other business. Brent shared that Channel 22 featured 3 clips about Groton history presented by the Vermont Historical Society. He sent links to a few of us, and they were very good. Maybe we could use them next year for our Lake focus.

Susan announced that the Lake Groton Association is planning for their 75th anniversary celebration next year.

Brent reported that there is stuff in the basement of the PPH that may be could be disposed of, or that someone might want. Something to keep in mind for the future.

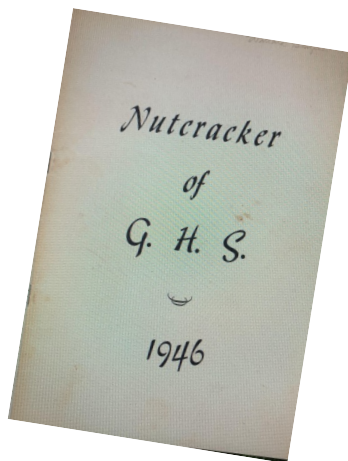
Deborah suggested we meet again in early October to make a market-plan for selling the new puzzles and the books.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Phyllis Burke, Recording Secretary

LOST

The Groton High School yearbook collection was last seen at the all-class reunion in 2016 at the Groton Community Building. They apparently did not get returned to the Groton Historical Society after the reunion. The Historical Society is most anxious to find this very valuable collection for visitors to look at when visiting the Peter Paul House, home of the Society.



FUNDRAISER

Jigsaw Puzzle From the VAST Snowmobile Trail to Owl's Head, from the Sleeping Sentinel Monument to the Gazebo, Groton's best loved landmarks have been transformed into a 12" x 18" 345 piece puzzle created by Groton artist Nichole Wolfgang, and made by the Vermont Puzzle Co., Waterbury, Vermont. The Groton Historical Society is raising funds to complete painting and repairing the Peter Paul House.

Details: - 12" x 18" puzzle \$20.00, Shipping \$6.00 per puzzle

Call Lise at (802) 584-3283, she can take a Credit Card for payment over the phone as well as arrange pick up

Or

Send checks to Groton Historical Society, PO Box 89, Groton, Vt. 05046

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