

# GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Groton, Vermont

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**Inside Look:** This 1954 engine has had a long life with the town. *Article on p.9*

## HOMECOMING: *Stories of the town's persistent pull* Part One

LOUISE REYNOLDS

The adage, “You can’t go home again,” perhaps familiar as the title of a novel by Thomas Wolfe, rings true for many people. In search of fresh vistas and broader horizons, pulled by education, by jobs or by love, we leave our homes when we’re young. We come back to visit—or we don’t—we create an ideal or a story based on our memories and our communications with those we’ve left behind.

Home, when we do come back, may seem a bit smaller, a bit changed, no longer ours. Groton is probably no different. Here, however, are two stories of people who did come home again in one way or another, lured by family, a slower pace, a stronger sense of community. Even by the weather.

These stories were written from emails, phone conversations and interviews. Here are Alissa Smith’s and Willard Benzie’s. You can read the next four compelling stories in the Winter issue of the newsletter.

### ***“It was childhood love that brought me back”***

Alissa Smith was just 15 years old when her family moved from Groton to Randolph. It may have been only an hour’s drive, but to Alissa, “it was like a whole world away.”

When I moved away in 1996, I was just barely beginning to find my place here, but prior to that I was an awkward adolescent and had some not so great experiences, so I was partly heartbroken, but also happy to leave some things behind and excited by all the new things ahead of me. I thought I would never ever come back to such a small-town place like Groton.”

Alissa graduated from high school and the University of Maine at Farm-



**Harold Puffer made the two signs at either end of the Village in 2001. They provide an iconic photo opportunity for visitors.**

ington, widening her distance from Groton even farther. Several years later she reconnected on MySpace with Josh Smith, who was, among other connections, the brother of Aaron—who just so happened to be her older brother Brice’s best friend. As a child, she had a secret crush on Aaron, fueled by all the time Aaron spent at her house while they were growing up.

She asked Josh, “Hey, do you remember who I am?” Josh said, “How could I forget? Aaron had a crush on you forever.” Aaron and Alissa started dating in 2005. “And lo and behold, I could find a reason to move back,” Alissa says.

After a year of dating they moved in together in a tiny one-bedroom in-law apartment behind Josephine French’s childhood home. Alissa and Aaron were married in 2008 on his grandfather’s property, on Powder

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**Order your  
GHS merch!  
See the order sheet  
inside for details.**



## President's Report Fall 2023

The July Member Meeting was well attended and fun. The crazy story of Bristol Bill and his counterfeiters, including the rumored tunnel under Rt. 302, was entertaining and is now posted on the GHS website. Here is the link: [Bristol Bill](#). You can also read the story, beginning on page 5 in this issue of the newsletter.

The new [Articles of Incorporation](#) passed at the August 26 Member Meeting, Open House and Groton Wedding Exhibit.

If you were not able to join us in August, please make sure you visit the Peter Paul House on October 7, Fall Foliage Day. We will repeat last month's Sleeping Sentinel talk at 12:00 pm. It is full of drama and facts that even well versed local folks will be surprised by, including the naming of Rt. 302, and the history of the Scott Monument in West Groton.

You **simply must see** Phyllis Burke's Wedding Exhibit. She is punching way above her weight class with this professionally mounted display of five Groton wedding dresses, several marriage certificates, garters and gloves and even a flower girl's dress.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the passing of George Hall, a long-time member of the GHS. George spent countless hours scanning the pages of the original *Mr. Glover's Groton* and turning the scans into PDF's. These files were the foundation of the updated version of our beloved Groton history.

**See you at the PPH on October 7<sup>th</sup>,  
Deborah Jurist**



**GHS "merch" is now on sale, including our own hand painted patch, available on stone color caps and zip-up hoodies in all sizes and in three colors. See the order sheet for details.**

## "Groton Weddings" Exhibit Informs and Delights



From the hand-made, impossibly wasp-waisted, silk satin wedding ensemble (complete with matching hat and kid gloves) to the pale blue organdy flower girl's dress, visitors to the Open House August 26 enjoyed a rare display of wedding dresses and accessories, marriage certificates and family photos curated by conservator Phyllis Burke.

While several items were already in the GHS collection, more were recently donated and others were loaned. Phyllis began working on the exhibit last year, after Barbara Vance gave the GHS a framed marriage certificate and photo of her grandparents.

Folks were highly engaged, sharing their own family stories and talking to Phyllis. Overheard: "You'd have to sell a lot of eggs to be able to make that dress!"

Come see "Groton Weddings" on Fall Foliage Day, when the PPH will be open from 10 to 3.



## “Homecoming,” *cont.*

Spring Road. It’s since become their home.

Alissa returned to Groton with a wealth of childhood memories: “I remember participating in Modern Woodmen of America youth group; yearly swim lessons at Boulder Beach—which was basically two weeks of fun in the sun; Fall Foliage shines bright in my memory as well.

“I loved to visit the Peter Paul House (I got to watch the renovations from my bedroom)—the old Groton Library that was located in the Town Office, where the treasurer’s office is now; I loved the smell of the old books, the mural downstairs where the kids’ books were, and the feeling that there were so many books to choose from.

“Parade (I don’t remember watching it, because I was in it almost every year)—Chicken Pie Supper (my mom ran the kitchen for many years during the Supper, and me and my siblings got to roam freely around the town while she was busy; it was a blast!).

“Dick’s Store—one time my mom needed something to add to our meal

## *Willard Benzie never really left home*

John Willard Benzie has lived in Michigan and Minnesota for most of his 95 years. Still, he thinks of Groton as his home, and spends time here fairly often—several times a year. But it’s not only his attachment to the town and his frequent visits to family and friends that make Groton Willard’s true home; it’s also his incredible archive—both digital and mental.

For 22 years, Willard was the editor of the Groton Historical Society newsletter, retiring just a year ago. He’s an encyclopedic resource for history, for facts, for names, events, connections, and for photos. Whether he wrote about an event for the newsletter or he edited someone else’s contribution, Willard has the information. For the last 33 years he’s been working on a comprehensive genealogy of Groton families, with a goal of including all the families listed in the Groton censuses from 1790 to 1950.

For Willard, a small town really is like a big family. This is just a bit of his story; here’s how he begins.



**Alissa and Aaron were married in 2008. They have four children: (from left to right) Ajax, Amelia, Adeline and Artemis. Right: Amelia holds her 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation certificate from BMU.**



and I was old enough to walk down to the store myself and get it for her; I was so proud. It was always a good day when I had the money to get a soda or candy from there; the park and the ice rink we had at least once down there; bike rides on the railroad bed.

“I loved that Groton Pond was so close and I spent a good amount of summer time up there.”

Today, Alissa and Aaron have four children, and Alissa is a busy and contributing citizen of Groton. She is a

member of the Historical Society (because she enjoyed visiting the PPH as a kid); she served on the Library Board for several years. Alissa works in the Community Garden and makes chicken pies for the Supper every year. She is also serving her first term as a BMU School District Board Member.

“I fell in love with the Town. The network of various personalities and histories and family and feelings of connectedness.... It has been lovely and comforting.... a return home.”



**The Benzie home was on the first street south of the railroad tracks in Groton. Willard’s mother, Helen, thought the family should have a proper street address, so she started using “Railroad Street” as part of their address. (Left to right: Willard’s father, James, and Helen; front row: Willard, Charlotte, Marilyn, Melvin, and Ina.**

“**M**y first homecoming to Groton, Vermont, was when I was only a few days old. I was born at my maternal grandparent’s farm in East Calais, Washington Co., Vermont where my parents were visiting for the weekend. My Dad and Grandpa had gone fishing, and my mother was helping my grandmother prepare dinner when she slipped on the parlor steps

on her way to fetch some milk from the well where it was stored to keep cool. The fall started her labor pains, so the local nurse, Marion, was called and they summoned Dr. Corson from Plainfield, who soon arrived and delivered me on 19th of June 1928.

I arrived at home a few days later.”

*Continued on p.4*

**“Homecoming,” cont.**

“Our home was on the first street south of the railroad tracks... Although the road on the north side was closer to the tracks, my mother thought our street should be named Railroad Street, so she started using it as our address. Before this our address was just Groton, Vermont.”

Willard grew up in the Railroad Street house with his mother and father, his grandmother, his sister Ina, the twins, Melvin and Marilyn, and sisters Charlotte and Janet. He attended the village school, where Mrs. Alice Goodine was his first grade teacher. In the fifth grade, Willard took music lessons on the clarinet from C. George McLure, and when he'd learned three or four pieces, he joined practices with McLure's Student Band. The band played weekly concerts during summers in Groton, Wells River and Fairlee. And in the fall, they played concerts and performed marching drills in front of the Grandstands at several local fairs.

Willard graduated from Groton High School in 1946 and joined the Navy at the end of World War II, leaving his hometown for five years. When he was discharged in 1951, he came back to Groton and worked for Les Page, cutting Christmas trees. He and Paul Tinkham and Les Page cut thousands of trees, which they bundled and stacked alongside the railroad tracks for loading onto the flat cars. They made ten cents a bundle. In January of 1952 he enrolled in Pre-forestry at the University of Vermont on the G.I. Bill.

He writes, “When I got out of the service in 1951 I wondered why people came to Groton and what keeps them in Groton? Agriculture was on its way out and granite manufacturing was leaving, and sawmills were shutting down. My job cutting Christmas trees before starting college at UVM got me thinking about the forests as a potential resource that could sustain a community when managed for continuous production of wood, water, wildlife, and other amenities.”

In June of that year Willard married Celia Darling, a descendant of John Darling, who is listed in the Groton census of 1791. Their first son, Jack, was born the following year, and they moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan in the



Willard graduated from Groton High School in 1946. (Left to right): Melvin, Father James, Ina, Mother Helen, Janet, Willard, and Charlotte.

In June of 1952, Willard and Celia Darling were married in Groton.



fall so Willard could finish a forestry degree at the University of Michigan. The family spent the next several decades in Michigan and Minnesota.

In 1970, Willard was appointed Chief of the Northern Conifer Research Laboratory in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. He retired in 1988 and came home to Groton with Celia, where they rented an apartment at the Puffer Motel, owned by Willard's sister Janet and her husband, Harold Puffer. They took care of Celia's mother until she died in December 1989.

Willard writes, “Moving back to Groton gave us an opportunity to catch up with a lot more friends. My wife died in 1995, but I continued to rent the

After Willard's retirement in 1988, Celia and Willard came home to Groton and rented an apartment at the Puffer Motel. “Moving back to Groton gave us an opportunity to catch up with a lot more friends,” he writes. Today, Willard lives in Grand Rapids, close to his family, but is a frequent “visitor” to Groton.



apartment... until 2006, when I moved back to Grand Rapids, MN to be closer to my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. I continue to visit family and friends in Groton almost every year and have only missed a few Fall Foliage Days and Groton High School reunions, since they started in 1991 to help Vermont celebrate two hundred years of statehood ,with the theme “Homecoming.”

But the connection runs deeper than that. Like the trees in the Groton Forest, and the forests of the northern midwest that he oversaw, Willard has deep roots sustaining his ties to his hometown. Willard's Grandfather Benzie came to Groton to start his own business manufacturing granite monuments and other granite products in the stonesheds east of the Depot. Willard's marriage to Celia (Darling) only deepened his ties to the town. Through his ambitious and ongoing effort to assemble a database of the genealogies of Groton families, called “grotonvt Family Tree,” he's discovered a multitude of cousins—his and Celia's—in the Groton area.

Although Willard Benzie may no longer be a resident of Groton, he's certainly a citizen of the town. What makes Groton his true home? He concludes, “the people and the forests are what make Groton special to me.”



# Bristol Bill and His Gang of Counterfeiters

*Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Groton Historical Society Membership*

DEBORAH JURIST

*On July 11, 2023, Deborah Jurist, the President of the Groton Historical Society, gave the talk that follows. While Bristol Bill might have put Groton on the map for his crime, and his story is widely told, the tale is often wildly told. In a time where misinformation is pervasive, Deborah looks at Bristol Bill and his counterfeiting gang with a new perspective, examining often-quoted sources for the story and asking, "How do we tell fact from fiction?"*

Groton has two "national level" stories in its past. The most famous is the pardon by Abraham Lincoln of William Scott, known as the "Sleeping Sentinel," during the Civil War. We will delve into that event at our August 26th Open House. The other is the counterfeiting scandal, brought to Groton by the famous "Bristol Bill" before the Civil War, in 1848.

A focus of our programs this year is looking at historical events that happened in Groton or to people from Groton, and how they become stories, and even myths.

We are curious about how these stories become the fabric of who we are and what we believe to be "true."

One important tool to make use of in this process is studying the sources of information. An individual telling the "story" may have a reason to distort the facts, or they may not remember them accurately. In fact, most people do not remember things accurately.

So, it is worthwhile to look at original sources and become familiar with who the "storyteller" is and read several accounts of the same event—especially if your gut tells you something might be "off" for some reason. It takes time. But with practice, you get faster at it and it is extremely important at this point in time.

The more we study history and discover all the ways that the stories of our past are manipulated, it helps us to sharpen our ability to recognize what we now refer to as "misinformation."



**"Bristol Bill" was born in England around 1802. He committed numerous crimes in England and was sentenced to prison in Australia. He escaped, traveling to New York, where he lived a life of crime. He eventually ended up in Groton, with a scheme to print and distribute counterfeit currency.**

We DO have the ability to recognize even subtle manipulations in the reporting of current events, and we have more tools than ever at our fingertips to verify what our guts tell us might be "fishy." By studying the way these distortions happened in the past, we come to understand

- It is NOT "worse" than ever before.
- And, we learn how to recognize "baloney" when we see it.
- We see how historians have uncovered facts to verify or negate historic stories.

You'll find the sources for this essay on the following pages; see what you think.

## The Players

**Bristol Bill**, also known as William Warburton, was born in England around 1802. He lived in London, Liverpool and Bristol. He also robbed a bank in Bristol, Rhode Island. In a pamphlet written about him in 1850, by George

Thompson, it is said that he was born into a wealthy family and went to Eton. He committed numerous crimes in England, for which he was sentenced to prison in Australia. He escaped by swimming to a boat offshore and sailed off to New York. There, he met Christian Meadows, an accomplished engraver, and Margaret O'Conner. More about his time in New York is coming up later ("Bristol").

**Christian Meadows** was also born in England, in 1814. He learned the craft of engraving as a young man and moved to Boston to make his fortune, where he married Elizabeth Mearns. For some reason he turned to crime, becoming a thief of petty goods. Eventually, he was caught, tried and sentenced to six years in prison. By 1846 he was employed as an engraver by a Mr. William Wilson, engraving and printing currency for several banks (Heller).

**Margaret O'Conner** was reputed to be an operetta singer in New York, as well as someone who traded in counterfeit money, buying something with a counterfeit bill and taking the change in legal currency. She was also supposed to be Bristol Bill's wife when she came to Groton (White). She was known as "Gookin Peg" in New York, whatever that means (Heller).

**George Green** was a New York gangster known as English Jim; he teamed up with Bristol Bill possibly as an enforcer (White).

**Ephraim Low** was a Groton merchant who was bankrupt at the time of these shenanigans, and is given credit for convincing Bill to come to Groton with Christian Meadows to print counterfeit money. (Heller)

In 1826 he opened a store in the building which eventually became the Coffrin Block, but was first known as Low's Store. Mr. Low "took a break" from the merchant's life from 1828 until 1833 when he returned and ran the store until his death in prison in 1850.

Waldo Glover states that Low was responsible for convincing Meadows to steal the printing dies (265).

*Continued on page 6*

**“Bristol Bill,” cont.**

Also according to Mr. Glover, in 1837, Low contributed \$1,080 toward the construction of the Methodist Episcopal Meeting House (122, 176).

**Peter Paul** was a Groton resident. He was a watchmaker and ran a jewelry and watch store in the west end of what is now the Peter Paul House—the home of the GHS. He was also a very fine carpenter and made some of the best furniture in Groton at the time (Glover 108).

**McLane Marshall**, another Groton resident, was an innkeeper in a building that was literally connected to the top floor of the old Groton General Store (Artesano) until 1854. That building was moved and became part of what is now the Groton Free Public Library, formerly the Goodine House, where Allen Goodine grew up (Glover 118-119). He then built the famous “Lake House” on Ricker Pond and the steam boat called the “Lady of the Lake.” It is unclear what his role in this scandal was (White).

**The Backstory**

Bristol Bill became a well known criminal in the US, especially in New York, where he was involved with several bank and jewelry store robberies. He was also a witness in an attempted murder in which the murder weapon was to be a bomb! Somehow, he was still free to move about and he ended up in Groton, with his buddy Christian Meadows, probably on the suggestion of Ephraim Low (“Bristol”).

Bill moved to a farm, referred to as the “Clough Place” by Johnny White, owned by Orlo Goodwin in the 1960’s and surmised by Willard Benzie to be part of what is now Seyon Ranch. Another of our sources, Paul Heller, says that they moved in with Ephraim Low, which could have been in the “Clough Place.”

Christian Meadows came to Groton with his wife, Elizabeth, and they took up lodging with Peter Paul, who had built an apartment upstairs (White). Although Johnny White also says they moved in with Bristol Bill. The plan was to alter bank notes, using Meadows as the engraver, and Bristol Bill, English Jim and Gookin Peg were to take charge of distribution (Heller).

**Private Issue Currency**

One question I had was, [How was currency printed in 1848? Didn't the federal government protect it?](#)

I found the following information at the University of Chicago Library’s Hannah Holborn Gray Special Collection Research Center:

“Although the individual states could not issue currency, they did have the right to charter private banks that could issue notes. From these private banks came a great flux of paper money that both oiled and clogged the wheels of commerce in pre-Civil War America. In addition to private banks, municipalities, transport companies, insurance companies, stores, et cetera, all issued scrip. The notes of these organizations were payable on demand and were only as strong as the bank or company itself. Thus, if too many notes were presented at once, a bank would simply close its doors and default.”

**Sources**

*Tonight we will dive into the Counterfeiting Gang and what happened in Groton. We will use seven sources. Each piece of information I cite has the source identified in the notes from this talk.*

*But I want to point out, none of these sources were eye-witnesses. They were all written after the fact. There is considerable data which can be verified—such as prison sentences—and a lot that can't. So take them with a grain of salt.*

1. An article by Paul Heller, who served as Director of Libraries at Norwich University, lives in Barre VT, writes historical articles for the Times-Argus and several journals and has recently published a book called *The Civil War and Central Vermont*.
2. “A Johnny White Recollection” is an article printed in the Historical Society newsletter. Johnny White (1898-1965) was a lifelong resident of Groton. He was considered the historical expert of his day. However, he wasn’t even born when the events took place! He is the author of *The Johnny White Memoirs*,” published by the Historical Society. This account of the Counterfeiting Gang was edited twice, once by Andrea Blair in 1992 and then by John Willard Benzie in 2022.
3. An article by David Richardson of Orange, Vermont (1832-1898). This was also published in the Historical Society newsletter, Fall 2017. He married Janette Darling of Groton in 1858, and then moved to Iowa. He was owner and editor of the Davenport Daily Democrat, and was a Regent of Iowa State University. The Richardsons “bought” Medad Mountain and built a summer home there. His article was also published in the *Caledonian* (date unknown).
4. Wikipedia - Bristol Bill was from England and had a vast history of crimes before he came to Groton. Wikipedia has background info about him and cites 38 informational sources.
5. *Mr. Glover’s Groton* - written by Waldo Glover which was first published in 1978, and is, in short, the most complete history of the town of Groton.
6. John Willard Benzie - Mr. Benzie, born in 1928, is a native son of Groton and brother of Janet Puffer. He left as a young man but kept his ties to the town securely intact. He has edited the Historical Society newsletter since the 1980s and continues to maintain the Groton family genealogy database from his home in Minnesota. His knowledge of Groton history is vast beyond imagination.

## The Plan and the Tunnel

According to David Richardson, the dies were shipped to Ephraim Low in ax boxes. Bristol Bill and company withdrew \$1,000 in one dollar bills from a bank in Danville. They planned to change the bills into higher denominations, relying on Christian Meadows and the equipment they had smuggled in.

It is said that the gang dug a tunnel under what is now Rt. 302. But, according to Willard Benzie, "Ephraim Low had a store that was torn down to build the Coffrin Block, which in turn burned down in 1925. The Coffrin Block was located where Sarky's (or Brown's Market in the 'old days') and Tim Spooner's Groton Garage are now.

The tunnel was actually a drainage culvert designed to carry storm water from the north side of the street, where the Carroll Ricker Funeral Home was (now a private home set back from the road, west of the Post Office), under the road... to the river, behind Low's store. The counterfeit equipment was found hidden in the culvert/tunnel, including a 1,500 lb. transfer plate and the press. It was found by A. J. Carpenter, who was the town's Road Commissioner at the time"

## The Arrest

How Christian Meadows and Bristol Bill were discovered is a bit murky. William Wilson, who owned the engraving business where Meadows had worked, followed the trail of his stolen property and that trail ended up in Wells River (Heller). Johnny White says Meadows was recognized by Oscar Hale, a teller at the Wells River Bank, and then he was seen in the company of Bristol Bill.

However, it is also believed that Bill was recognized, and that led the owner of the engraving company from Boston to think that Meadows would be nearby.

However it came about, Sheriff Colonel Jacob Kent, the Caledonia County Sheriff, was notified. He gathered up a group of officers and they raided the Clough Place, where they apprehended Bristol Bill on March 5, 1850.

According to Johnny White, Bill's wrists were abnormal and he had very



**Counterfeiting was a serious crime in the time before the federal government became the sole issuer of currency. Augustus Bartlett passed this counterfeit \$10 bank bill; he was found guilty in 1808. (Published in the Burlington Free Press, courtesy of the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration.)**

slender hands, so he slipped out of the handcuffs that Sheriff Kent had put on him at the farmhouse. But, he did not escape. His ankles were "fettered" and he was taken by oxcart, to jail in Danville.

Following the arrest, a complete set of burglar's tools, the 1500 lb. transfer plate, blank copper plates, and a printing press were found in the culvert/tunnel. One hundred thirty-five dies were also discovered, under a beehive

owned by Ephraim Low behind Brown's store, probably on information given by the Groton men.

Ephraim Low, Peter Paul and McLane Marshall were all arrested. Margaret O'Conner and Elizabeth Meadows were not. Peter Paul and McLane Marshall cooperated with the state and were released. Ephraim Low died in prison in Danville while awaiting trial, which was slated to occur in June of 1850

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## The Trial

According to the Johnny White article (edited by Andrea Blair and Willard Benzie), Judge Poland was the presiding judge. Mr. Bliss M. Davis was the County Attorney. The defendants were represented by lawyers from Boston. Bristol Bill and Christian Meadows were both found guilty and sentenced to 10 years in state prison in Waterbury.

Johnny White writes, "However, quoting Judge Poland, 'While writing out the sentences at my desk, I heard a noise and looking up, Bristol Bill was recovering from having struck Mr. Bliss Davis with a blow. I supposed with his hand or fist, but Mr. Davis straightened up, put his hand on his neck and cried, 'Pull it out! Pull it out!'"

'Mr. Daniel Coffrin, Groton Sheriff, sitting nearby, sprang up and pulled a case knife out of Mr. Davis' neck. Immediately, they carried him from the courtroom to his hotel, and after the prisoners were secured, I adjourned court, and followed them, expecting to find him either dead or dying. But, as I entered the room, he looked up and exclaimed, 'I am not dead yet, Judge. You and I will punish a great many more rascals.'"

A letter from the Warden at Windsor State Prison to Andrea Blair stated that Bristol Bill was discharged by Gov. Erastus Fairbanks, after serving six years of his sentence. Once released, he was brought back to Caledonia Court and tried for his attack on Mr. Bliss. He died in 1882 while serving his second sentence" (White).

## The Fate of Christian Meadows

According to Paul Heller, Christian Meadows began his sentence in Windsor State Prison, however he began to be seen as an unwitting victim. His and his wife's demeanor was described in the Caledonian Record: "Meadows appears careworn and anxious, while his wife, true to that affection which burns brighter as the clouds of adversity thicken, accompanies her husband, and sits by his side, holding in her arms a prattling infant... The appearance of Mrs. Meadows is amiable, modest, and unassuming, indicating little acquaintance or affinity with such causes." Meadows was seen as a "victim."

While an inmate at the Windsor Prison, his reputation as an expert engraver began to spread far and wide.

A group of Dartmouth Alumni sought out Meadows to create an engraving of the college campus. Meadows was granted permission to visit Dartmouth while in prison in 1851. He created a copper plate of the campus. Next, Meadows was approached by the New Hampshire Agricultural Society and asked to create an engraving for their diploma.

At that point, Meadows requested that the officers of the Society help him win "liberation from his imprisonment" (Heller).

It seems at this point he got a lucky break. He had been supplied with an image of a famous elm tree that towered over the boyhood home of Daniel Webster to use in his design for the diploma! Mr. Webster was so impressed with the engraving that he wrote a three-page letter to Governor Williams of Vermont, pleading on Meadows' behalf.

He waxed poetic about Meadows' victimhood and the suffering of his wife, Elizabeth, and his great skill as an artist. However, Governor Williams did not pardon Meadows (Heller).

But, in 1853, Gov. Erastus Fairbanks not only pardoned him, he arranged for Elizabeth and his son to be present at the surprise event, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, AND he himself contributed \$100 toward the purchase of a house for the family.

Meadows proceeded to create a large body of work that includes engravings of the Barre Academy, Thetford Academy, and a portrait of the Rev. David Merrill of Peacham, among many others (Heller).



**Three Dartmouth students commissioned Christian Meadows to make this engraving of the College. The Windsor Prison Warden allowed Meadows to travel to Hanover to make the drawings for the print.**

## Groton Men's Genealogies

**Peter Paul** was the 12th of 13 children. He was born March 18 in 1811 in Groton; he died May 1, 1861. He married Sally Maria Meader, who died in 1892. Both are buried in the Groton Village Cemetery.

**Ephraim Low** was the seventh of eight children. He was born April 19, 1800, in Groton. He married Emily Hall about 1823, in Groton. He died in the Danville Jail in 1850 and is buried in the Village Cemetery.

**McLane Marshall** was the first of three children. He was born in 1816. He died in 1889 in San Francisco, California. He married Abigail Vance in 1838 in Groton; she died in 1885, also in San Francisco. They are both buried in the Village Cemetery.



**"The state of Vermont vs. William H. Warburton." Case heading from the Caledonia County Court clerk for Bristol Bill's second trial, in which he faced charges for stabbing County Attorney Bliss M. Davis in the neck with a case knife..**



# That 1954 Fire Engine Has a Long Story



The Groton Volunteer Fire Department bought the engine in 1954 from H.O. Taylor Chevrolet in Wells River. It was painted green at the time. The engine served the town for nearly 40 years until it was retired in the 1990's.

These firefighters from the 1970's would have been familiar with the engine.

## LOUISE REYNOLDS

When this year's Fall Foliage parade sets off down Scott Highway, one of the crowd favorites will be the old red fire engine, with its spinning light and shiny metal bell. For those of you who've been curious about the engine, as I have, here's its story, courtesy of Brent Smith, who was patient enough to sit down with me and talk about the fire engine during a slow open house in September.

The Fire Department bought the truck in 1954 from H.O. Taylor Chevrolet, in Wells River. Carroll Ricker was Chief back then. A fire engine starts out as a basic truck; Hollis Jordan, who owned the Square Front Garage, mounted a hose body from a Model A Ford and a pump onto the truck. The truck happened to be green, so the last step was to paint it red.

Although there were hoses and a pump on the engine, the small water tank didn't carry enough water to fight a fire effectively. The engine went to the fire, where the men would unload the ladders, axes and irons. Several firefighters would begin to attack the fire, while others would "lay a line," spooling out the hose from the burning building as they drove the engine to the closest accessible water source. If the engine itself was unable to get close enough to the water, the firefighters lugged a portable pump to the water source and connected it to a hose that would serve as an intake for the reservoir in the truck. Water would flow into the truck and out the big hose onto the burning structure. This could take precious time.

Brent recalls hearing the story about a barn that burned in the Village in 1963. Because the men had to use the portable pump, it took 45 minutes to get water on the barn—a significant achievement at the time. And while nothing was left of the barn, the house was saved.

In 1970, when Harold Puffer was Chief, the Fire Department bought another truck. Charles Frost remembers it as an old truck they transformed into a tanker fire truck by putting the tank from an old milk truck on it. Charles recalls using barn paint to paint the truck red. The truck was old; this was its last service. When they took it to a fire on Jefferson Hill, the tank broke.

They replaced the tank, which had carried an impressive amount of water, with a brand new one that was made for an oil truck and carried 1600 gallons. Later, when they acquired the funds to replace the chassis on the old truck, they bought a new truck from H.O. Taylor, and mounted the oil tank on it. Then they painted the green chassis red. Again.

Now the 1954 fire engine worked in tandem with the tanker truck. Both the fire engine and the new tanker would go directly to the burning structure. The tanker could immediately attack the fire, while the old engine laid a line to a water supply so it could keep the tanker full. That way, the firefighters didn't run out of water.

Another new fire engine was purchased in 1981. It was a "real" hook and ladder, with a full complement of ground ladders, a pump and a large tank.

It was purpose-built (and red), a "triple combination pumper," Brent says. The old engine still went to fires, but it was no longer the primary engine.

"The last fire I remember we used it on was the Harry Welch fire," Brent says, recalling the big fire on Hooper Hill Road. "The barn burned. We used it for mop-up. Must have been in the '90's."

Eventually, in about 1994, it was retired.

What was the biggest fire the old engine saw?

Probably in the late '50's or early 60's. It came to be called "the Ricker Mill fire." Brent tells the story, one he's heard—and told—many times.

"It was a humongous fire. They see the glow in the sky from here, and they get into that truck, and they went all the way to Ricker Mills, but it wasn't there; it was further up. And so they went... I think they ended up going all the way up through to Lanesboro to find this fire, which they never were able to put out.

There's a long pause.

"Because it was the Northern Lights."

The old fire engine had served the town of Groton well for a good 40 years. After its retirement, Jimmy Silly at J.C. Auto Body refurbished, sandblasted and repainted it. The engine is now in Alissa and Aaron Smith's barn. Aaron, Brent's son, is a Groton firefighter. Most years it comes out for the Fall Foliage Parade. The honor of driving the engine is at the Chief's discretion; last year it was Phillip and Tonya Palmer's turn.

Brent's turn? He says he would like his "last ride to the cemetery in that truck."



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