

# GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Groton, Vermont

Summer 2023



**Inside look:** In August of 1924, Waldo Glover, Groton's hometown historian, dedicated a marker commemorating Revolutionary War-era structures in Peacham. His were words we would be wise to listen to today, 99 years later. *Article on p.2*

### Charles Frost has 'many old stories'

DEBORAH JURIST  
LOUISE REYNOLDS

Charles Frost is truly a native son of Groton. His fourth great-uncle, William Frost, is listed in the town's first census, in 1800. His great-great grandfather, Isaiah Frost, is listed in the census of 1820. Charles grew up in the pristine white cape house off Powder Spring Road that his grandfather Orange Frost built in 1901 and his father, Elmer C. Frost, Sr., bought in 1925, the year before he married Charles' mother, Vera Shields Frost. He and his wife, Diane, live there still.

The view hasn't changed that much, he says, though they can't see the village as clearly because the trees have grown up along the bed where the railroad used to run.

Groton was a small town when Elmer Charles Frost, Jr. was born in 1938. Still, residents had a choice of two grocery stores: Burt Brown's Meats and Groceries or the I.G.A., owned by E.G. Ricker and Son. They could buy Crosley refrigerators and radiators, livestock, poultry feed and Blue Ribbon turkeys, commission a cemetery memorial, get a haircut from Allen Goodine's father, and have their trucks and cars repaired at one of the three service stations; all without leaving town limits. Although Groton had perhaps only 300 citizens, 18 of those citizens appear with the last name of "Frost" in the 1940 census. For a young boy, Groton held a world of family and wonder—now, memories.

Charles was the fourth of four children, with three sisters. His great-grandfather Chester Orr, from Rye-gate, fought in the Civil War and was imprisoned at Andersonville Prison in Georgia, where he endured solitary confinement. When Chester came home after the War he was "totally blind." Charles has visited the site.



**Charles Frost at the kitchen table in the house where he has lived for eighty-five years; May, 2023.**

He inherited his great-grandfather's military musket; he remembers playing with it as a boy, though he never shot the rifle. "I don't know how it stayed with him," he says. "I thought they would have taken it away."

Chester Orr is buried in the Groton Cemetery, where Charles paid his respects over the Memorial Day weekend.

There was a lot of room to play and explore in Groton. Charles had a pony when he was a small boy. And there's a photo of him, at perhaps age five, sitting in a small metal fire truck. "We didn't put out many fires with that one," he laughs. In the summer there was swimming in Keenan Brook, off Railroad Street. "We used to go in there and dam it up with stones," he says. And there were plenty of boys in the neighborhood—Doug French, Harold Puffer, Ralph Smith; he remembers playing football every fall along Lorimer Puffer's lawn.

The house was up the hill from the depot, where steam trains passed through Groton on their way down to Woodsville and back to Montpelier as many as six times a day in the 1940's.

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#### 2023 OFFICERS

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**You are invited to the Annual Meeting of the Groton Historical Society, Tuesday, July 11 at 6 p.m. at the Peter Paul House**

## President's Report Summer 2023

*Now that June is here, the fun has begun at the Peter Paul House.*



We had a productive Clean Up Day, punctuated by adorable Beatrix Potter moments of finding colorful Hershey Kiss wrappers left by little mice in corners and drawers. The house was vacuumed, dusted, power washed, and a fallen ash tree is being removed.

We are having so much fun playing with the mannequins donated by member Sarah Spira, which we are calling “womannequins” because they are becoming the framework for a Groton Family bridal dress exhibition coming August 26.

The GHS Articles of Association, which were written in 1989—before the Peter Paul House was even purchased—are being updated, and a rough draft will be ready for membership review at the Public Annual Meeting, July 11 at 6 p.m.

There will be a presentation about Bristol Bill and his gang of Counterfeiters at the July 11 meeting.

We are hoping to have the Peter Paul House open for visitors more often this summer. The potential dates are in the calendar. Watch for the Open Flag, notices on the town message board and Facebook.

Please enjoy the Newsletter and save the dates in the calendar!  
**Deborah Jurist—President**

### From the Newsletter Editor

Many thanks to Charles Frost for his time, his good memory and his patience in answering innumerable questions for his story. And to Phyllis Burke for taking time from her “Groton Family Weddings” exhibit to sit down for a lengthy and interesting conversation. And especially to Dave Stoner, for authoring not just one, but two thorough articles on the geology of Groton. — **Louise Reynolds**

## ‘It Is Well for Us as a People...’ Waldo Glover’s words to remember

LOUISE REYNOLDS

On a pleasant Wednesday in August of 1924, Waldo Glover, Groton’s scholar and historian, stood by a slab of stone bearing a bronze plate beside the Old Hazen Road. The newly erected marker commemorated the Peacham stockade and other Revolutionary War-era structures, including what is now known as the Bayley-Hazen Military Road.



The road had been the brainchild of Jacob Bayley, a founding father of Newbury. After writing a series of letters urging General George Washington to build a shorter military route into Canada, Bayley received a commission to build such a road in late April of 1776. He and his crew of sixty or so men began construction of the road in Wells River, ending six miles beyond Peacham by mid-June. As Continental Army troops began a retreat from Quebec, Washington feared British troops could just as easily use that new route to invade to the south. He ordered Bayley to halt the work.

The road project lay dormant until the summer of 1779, when Colonel Moses Hazen and Colonel Timothy Bedel of the Continental Army were commissioned to lead two regiments to extend the road about 60 miles from Peacham through Cabot into St. John’s, in Canada. Hazen called an end to construction 40 miles short of St. John’s, in Westfield, Vermont, at a point now known as “Hazen’s Notch.”

Much of the Bayley-Hazen Military Road has long been overtaken by local wayfares, but sections continue today throughout the Northeast Kingdom. The Peacham Historical Society, in partnership with the Vermont Society and the Sons of the American Revolution, commissioned the roadside marker, and asked Mr. Glover to speak. Although Waldo Glover’s task was to commemorate the deeds of men who lived 150 years earlier, his words ring as true now as they did on that summer day 99 years ago.

“We stand today upon historic ground. We have assembled to record in imperishable bronze and granite not only the location of an important military road of Revolutionary days, but also the site of a few dwellings which for years represented the outpost of civilization in this wilderness of the North. It is well for us to do this. It is well for us as a people, in this fast-moving and sometimes apparently thoughtless age, perplexed as we are by problems, social and political, which seem almost too difficult for human solution, to pause for a few moments by the way in our pilgrimage through this world, and, in a memorial celebration like this in which we are engaged - a celebration of almost religious significance - to consider again the heroic deeds of the men and women of old time, and to discover, if possible, those hills of inspiration unto which they lifted up their eyes for help.”

### For Further Reading...

I’m indebted to Larry Coffin, the past President and the Curator of the Bradford Historical Society, for his detailed article on the Bayley-Hazen Military Road. Coffin, who taught high school history classes for 42 years in Bradford, writes about local history in his blog, *In Times Past*. “The Bayley-Hazen Road: Path to the Wilderness” was posted on August 5, 2013. You can find Larry Coffin’s blog at [larrycoffin.blogspot.com](http://larrycoffin.blogspot.com).

**“Charles Frost”** *cont.*

Troop trains came through regularly during the Second World War. Every morning the Station Master would use a two-wheeled cart to bring the mail down from the Post Office to the train. The trains picked up huge loads of logs, coal, grain, granite—even prefab house kits ordered from the Sears Roebuck catalog. You could hear the engines all day long and especially at night when they blasted their whistles before each intersection as they neared the depot.

In the winter, there might be a skim of frost on the tracks. To address this, the railroad workers backed the couplings off so they were loose. Then the engine would start to move forward, spinning the wheels on the tracks. The friction warmed the tracks and melted the frost so the train could get moving again.

Charles’ Uncle Ulric Legare worked as a telegraph operator. He and his wife, Della, could ride the train for free. Occasionally, Charles would board the train with his Aunt Della and his cousin Merrill, heading to the big “metropolis” of Woodsville for a day of shopping and fun, where they would “tomp around the big city, so to speak.” Della got most of her grocery shopping done in Woodsville, Charles says.

Groton High School is proud to claim Charles Frost as an alumnus of the class of 1956. When he began first grade with Mrs. Thelma Donald, there were 19 children in his class. “I was scared to death of her,” he says. “She was a nice woman. That was a big thing, to go to first grade all the year for me.” The Summer 2003 GHS newsletter notes that when Thelma Donald retired from teaching first and second grade in 1964, she had taught every child in Groton to read for more than 30 years.

Charles has high praise for his teachers. “Great teachers all the way through; they were really devoted,” he says. “Being a boy, and kind of foolish sometimes... I stayed my share after school. But they were always there. They tried to get you to act the way you should.”

“I think it worked, more or less,” he adds.

The school occupied the place where the Fire Station is now. Gym class



**Charles Frost loved his feisty pony, Peanuts when he was 10 years old. In high school, “Charlie” loved sports, especially basketball. The Groton School in 1957. Students attended the school from grades one through twelve. After years of deliberation, the Blue Mountain Union School was built in 1970, and the building was burned down in 1972 as a training exercise for firemen in Groton and other nearby towns. Today, this is the site of the fire station.**

took place in the Morrison Building, where there was a large open space with a wood floor. Spectators watched basketball games from the sidelines. The town built what is now the Community Building in 1950, allowing students to eat lunch in the kitchen and enjoy sports in a real gym. Four young men and five young women graduated alongside Charles.

As a young man, Charles worked with his father, a contractor. Frost Builders built and remodeled many of the old homes in Groton. Elmer Frost bought two buildings next to the old

train station, the For All Grain Company and the Groton Grain Company. These would become the shop and office of Frost Builders. Though no longer owned by the business, they still stand today.

Charles remembers his father taking him to work with him many times. When he was a child, his father and his crew built the former Nelson Farm barn, off the Barnet Center Road. Somehow, young Charles climbed up and took a precarious walk along the ridgepole of the tall barn, where he was spotted by the men, who alerted his father.

*Continued on p. 4*

**“Charles Frost”** *cont.*

Fortunately, he’s here to tell the tale. Today, the farm is producing eggs for Pete and Jerry’s, the organic egg folks.

More recently, Charles has been an important resource for the Historical Society and the people who come to learn about the history of their houses.

He has also been an invaluable member of the Fire Department, which he joined when he was just a sophomore in high school. “A lot of us did,” he says. “My dad was on it. A lot of the guys were getting older; the older guys just couldn’t do it.”

As a new firefighter, he was known as a “greenhorn,” which meant he had to learn everything on the job. Seventy years ago, the fire department was in a small building on Powder Spring Road. Firefighters didn’t have much equipment, though that year, 1954, the town would purchase a truck, the one featured every year in the Fall Foliage Parade (Look for a story about the truck in the next issue!).

The siren that called the men to duty could be heard near and far. Chief Carroll Ricker tried to avoid ringing the siren. If the fire was small, like a chimney fire, he would just telephone a few men. One time the siren went off, Charles recalls; “That was a problem because everyone in town went.” The result was a major bottleneck.

While Charles doesn’t like remembering the fires and accidents that often resulted in tragedies for families, he does recall one incident with some humor. Harry Welch, who lived at the west end of Hooper Hill Road, called Charles one day because he needed some help cleaning out a plugged chimney. Harry had a ladder up on the roof, and he gave Charles a large section of railroad track tied to a length of rope.

The track was “exceedingly heavy,” and Harry Welch told Charles to just drop it down the chimney to clear the



**Charles Frost lives with his wife, Diane, in the house off Powder Spring Road that his grandfather, Orange Frost, built in 1901. He’s lived there all his life, and says the view is mostly unchanged, though the trees have grown up along the railroad bed.**

soot. So that’s what he did. As it fell, they could hear it clanging down the chimney...BOOM! It had hit a ledge. From his perch on the roof Charles looked down onto the dooryard, and there stood Harry, his face completely covered in soot, only his eyes showing. Jessie Welch, Harry’s wife, was angry because her tidy kitchen was thoroughly dusted with black soot.

Charles was left to pull the iron track back up the chimney (chimneys were taller back then to keep the sparks away from the cedar shingle roofs), which took even more strength. When he climbed down, Harry just looked at him and said, “I’m going to the barn.” And off he went.

Groton has changed since those days. The fire department has modernized; trains no longer run through town. Although you can get a good meal and basic groceries at the Upper Valley Grill, you have to drive to Woodsville to do a big weekly shopping. And the

nearest place to get a haircut is Shear Animal, in Woodsville. But, as his family has for years, Charles still attends the First Baptist Church, where his father was a deacon and he was a trustee. He and Diane still live in the house where he grew up, with a view into the hills and fields to the west. Charles is still working, though Frost Builders takes on just a few projects these days, “not anything big anymore,” he says.

“My whole life was work at a younger age. I loved work. I still do today, but age makes it less...” Charles trails off. He enjoys seeing the houses and buildings in town that his father, or he and his father worked on. He says his wife wants him to go around and document what they built over the years, but he’s never done it, though they built a lot of places.

“It makes you feel good, maybe, what you’ve accomplished in life,” Charles says. “I’m proud of it, but yet... Others have done as well too.”

## **Join us at the GHS Annual Membership Meeting to hear the story of ‘Bristol Bill and His Gang of Counterfeiters’**

**B**ack in the days before the federal government printed our national currency, a notorious burglar from England, known as “Bristol Bill,”

arrived in Groton with a talented engraver named Christian Meadows. They were led by a local merchant, Ephraim Low.

Much havoc ensued, including the digging of a tunnel under what is now Scott Highway and the attempted courtroom murder of the Prosecutor by Bristol Bill himself.

*Come to the Annual Meeting, Tuesday, July 11 at 6 p.m. in the Peter Paul House, to hear GHS President Deborah Jurist tell the story of Bristol Bill and his gang of counterfeiters. Deborah will also examine documents and genealogies of the Groton folks who were sucked into this heinous and memorable adventure.*

# Groton's Glacial Geology

## The legacy of glaciers and people on the land

DAVID STONER

David Stoner, a hydrogeologist who lives in Groton, has worked for four decades to solve a range of environmental problems. Dave volunteered to write two articles for the GHS newsletter. The first article focused on the bedrock foundation of Groton and its granite deposits. Part Two covers the legacy of the continental glaciers that covered all of New England and those forces that modified the glacial deposits over the last 10,000 years ago—the natural succession that transformed plant and animal life and the impact of human habitation.

### Continental Glaciers

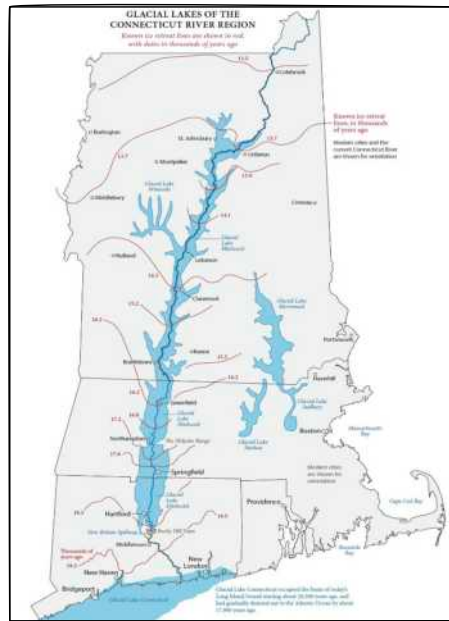
Beginning about two million years ago and ending about 10,000 years ago, continental glaciers moved over all of New England, burying the region in thousands of feet of slowly moving, grinding ice.

Evidence indicates that glacial ice expanded into and withdrew from our area four times during that two million-year span. The giant masses of ice attained their greatest thickness in eastern Canada. As the mass of glacial ice grew, the leading edge moved south as far as Long Island and east to the islands off the coast of Massachusetts.

This ice overrode all the land in Vermont, mountains and valleys alike. It scoured the earth, loosening it and grinding away the underlying rock and depositing it farther along its path. Most of the material that covers the bedrock foundation in all of Vermont is a type of deposit called “glacial till.” Glacial till may not only include New England’s iconic house-sized boulders and cobbles, but also fine sediment, all mixed together. Till consists of a heterogeneous mixture of materials; some till is much sandier, and some contains more fine material, like silt and clay.

Glacial meltwater also left behind signs of its presence. Perhaps the most apparent evidence of glaciation on the land mass is the long, narrow peninsula at the southern end of Ricker Pond. Extending almost 700 feet into the pond, the peninsula is a perfect place for skipping stones or perching a beach chair. It’s also a good example of an “esker.” Meltwater erodes small tunnels within glaciers, carrying sand and gravel in its flow. The debris left behind when the glacier melts completely form an esker. That this one is surrounded by water makes it easily visible.

One interesting chapter in Groton’s geological history is the story of a giant glacial lake, one of several in Ver-

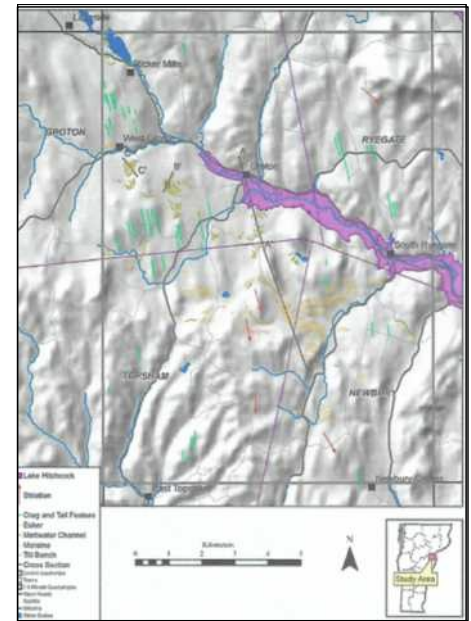


**Glacial Lake Hitchcock was one of the largest of the glacial lakes, left behind as the giant ice sheets retreated from New England 15,000 years ago. Formed after a plug of sediment effectively dammed glacial meltwater up the Connecticut River Valley from where Bradley Airport is today, it also flowed into the Wells River valley.**



**In this screenshot from Google Earth, the esker that forms the peninsula on Ricker Pond is clearly visible. The unique landform is a result of glaciation.**

mont. As the ice melted for the final time, a plug of sediment formed in the Connecticut River Valley in the vicinity of Rocky Hill, Connecticut. This dam backed water up the Connecticut River Valley and the Wells River Valley and the lake



it formed rose 815 feet above mean sea level in Groton. Known as Glacial Lake Hitchcock, the body of water endured for some 4000 years before the dam was breached and it drained. If we could have been there at the right time, we could have launched a boat near Groton Tire and Auto—about 800 feet above mean sea level today—and floated down the lake to the site of Bradley International Airport.

Though Lake Hitchcock left little visible evidence of its ancient presence, it’s possible the large sand pit on the north side of Rte. 302, just into Ryegate, is the product of a delta formed where a meltwater tributary entered the lake. The sand deposits upon which the old Groton Village Cemetery is located are those from a Lake Hitchcock beach that existed for thousands of years. The sandy quality of the soil made for easier digging and better drainage.

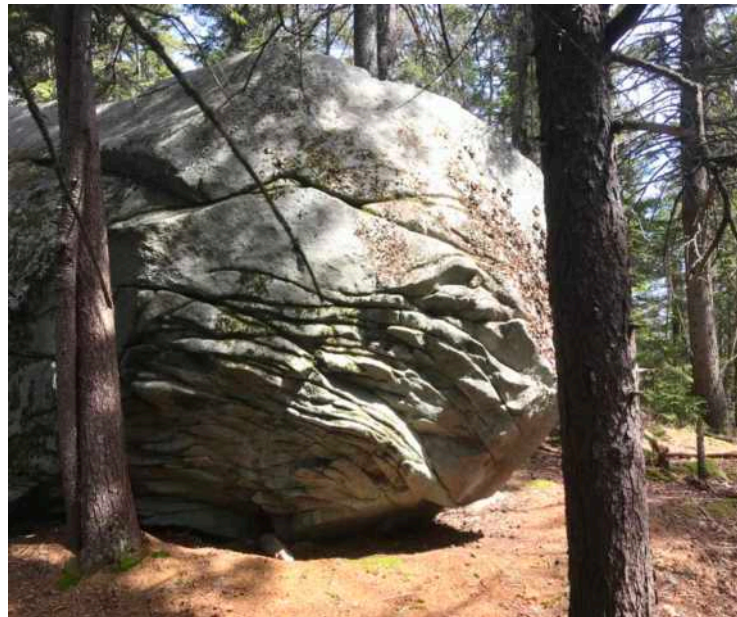
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## “Geology of Groton” *cont.*



**LEFT:** The Matterhorn, in Switzerland, where the glacier’s retreat has exposed a field of glacial till. After two intense heat waves last summer, the Alps’ glaciers are on track for their highest losses of mass in at least 60 years of record keeping.

**RIGHT:** The giant rocks in the Groton State Forest are a destination for boulderers.



### Post-glacial Groton

Imagine Groton shortly after the Lake Hitchcock dam was breached. The exposed land would have looked very much like this ground surface in the mountains of Switzerland where a glacier retreated a few years ago, leaving ground that is covered only with the most primitive forms of plant life.

Here in Groton, the land transformed over the course of hundreds, or perhaps thousands of years from tundra to mature forest. In stream valleys, regular flooding deposited sand, gravel, silt and organic material in a flood plain of the most fertile soil. For thousands of years, the forest floor accumulated leaf litter and other organic matter to form a thick layer of topsoil on top of the glacial debris. By the time humans arrived, even on steep slopes formed by rocky and compact glacial till deposits, deep soil had formed.

Ongoing conflict between Europeans with each other (English and French) and between non-natives and natives pushed most of the Abenakis out of the area well before the American Revolution. Once non-native settlers entered our town, farming spread everywhere it was feasible. The land was tilled, used for pasture or logged. The first non-native settlers described the soil as rocky, but relatively fertile.

Most of the land is hilly and some of it is very steep. The glacial till underlying most of the terrain contains finer material like silt and clay and does not

let water infiltrate easily. A high percentage of the precipitation that falls runs off. The mature forest cover, however, meant roots and duff limited the force of runoff from eroding the soil. As settlers and succeeding generations cleared the trees and used much of the land for raising crops and grazing sheep, erosion increased and the land became less fertile.

An online exhibit from the Vermont Historical Society explains, “The vast woodlands were seen as something to be cleared for farmland and a resource to be used for potash, home and shipbuilding, and fuel.” Over 150 years, Vermont’s landscape changed from dense forest to over 70% pastureland. The loss of soil was extreme.

George Perkins Marsh (his father built the brick house at the center of what is now the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller estate in Woodstock) was a scholar and an early advocate for environmental conservation. In an 1847 address to the Agricultural Society of Rutland County, he described the result: “The suddenness and violence of our freshets increases in proportion as the soil is cleared; bridges are washed away, meadows swept of their crops and fences, and covered in barren sand, or themselves abraded by the fury of the current.”

That damage is no longer visible today. Over many decades, from the 1880’s on, farms largely disappeared from the hilly landscape as farmers

moved away from Vermont. Some described the land as “tired out.” Their reasons were many, chief among them the friendlier climate and more productive land in the valleys and to the west. Some left for jobs in the expanding cities of southern New England. The Groton Town Plan of 2017 shows just three working farms here; today, word has it there is only one. The Vermont National Resources Council reports that forest covers 80% of the state—almost a reverse of conditions 100 or so years ago.

In Groton, logging had long been the main industry, with sawmills operating at as many as twelve sites in town. The last intensive, large-scale timber harvesting ended here in the early 1900’s, and the state of Vermont purchased the first tract of land for the Groton State Forest in 1919—timberland that had been harvested by lumber companies. Today, 41% of the land mass of Groton is publicly held, mostly in the State Forest.

The Town Plan describes Groton as a “residential town, with many workers traveling to other towns to work.” The loss of small hill farms over the last century is a sad transition, but the reforestation of the town has aided in restoring the soil and protecting the quality of the Wells River. It has certainly brought visitors to enjoy the natural resources that abound in our town—ultimately, a result of the process of glaciation.

# For Phyllis Burke, Antique Clothing Tells a Story

## Q & A with the GHS conservator

LOUISE REYNOLDS

*It's a beautiful early June day at the Peter Paul House. In a sunny bedroom upstairs, Phyllis Burke is examining a plastic, perforated asparagus box she's using to store Civil War Captain William Peck's hat. "These boxes were just sitting in a row to go out with the trash," she says. "I don't know why I didn't get them all. Just perfect!"*

*Her enthusiasm is contagious. Phyllis is the highly knowledgeable and dedicated conservator for the Groton Historical Society. She's spent much of the ten years she's lived here working with the GHS to research, safeguard and share the clothing that's been donated. Phyllis has extensive experience in sewing and costume design for theater as well as a love for cultural history.*

*She paused in her work to talk with me about her background, her work with the GHS collection, and the upcoming exhibit.*

**Phyllis, when did you become interested in clothing and textiles, in their stories and their conservation? What prompted your interest?**

From the time I was a little girl, I was interested in sewing and fabric. I was lucky to have people in my family who helped me, as well as several older ladies in the community, who, as they were getting rid of things, got rid of them my way. I started to have a collection of lace and feathers, ribbons and pieces of old fabric, and I would make doll clothes out of them. Some of them I just saved.

And then, I would gather pictures. They didn't have to be of old clothing. I would save ads from Life magazine, and clothing from other lands and current pictures—the car ads had models draped across a car; gorgeous ballgowns... By the time I was 12, I was making my own clothes on my grandmother's treadle sewing machine. Also, I took home ec; that helped.

In high school, I worked on costumes for plays. In college, I only did that one year. But after I was married, we moved to Nova Scotia because my husband's family had been from there. Nova Scotia has very active community theater. And right away, I became the costume lady for the local theater crew. I was the person people got in touch with if they had old clothes they wanted to donate, and we ended up with a huge, wonderful collection. It

was a community that had been very wealthy at one time.

While I was there, I was able to take a couple of workshops with people in the province who were professional costume makers and knew a lot about the history. And I just kept collecting books and reading.

I finally ended up here in Groton, where I think we have a lovely collection for an historical society of this size and a community this size—worth working on. The reason it's important to me is that clothing ties in always to history, and what was going on at the time, and why certain fabrics were available, why they weren't, and who was doing the work. I like tying the pieces of clothing in with the families if I can find out who donated them, or who wore them—even better. Then I can write a little bio about the piece.

**You've been in Groton for ten years. Did you immediately find your way to the Historical Society?**

Pretty immediately. I'm also interested in old houses—not to the same extent—but the whole understanding of how people lived and how they got along. And the technologies that have changed, and how different life was for people, depending on their socioeconomic status. All of that is really interesting to me. And how life was affected by wars; right? Or sickness. And how relationships have changed.



**Phyllis Burke, the conservator for the Groton Historical Society, adjusts Captain William Peck's hat. Phyllis has cared for the clothing at the GHS for the last ten years. She is currently working on the "Groton Family Weddings" exhibit, which will debut in August at the Peter Paul House.**

**Do you know how many items of clothing there are in the GHS collection? Can you hazard a guess? Has it grown since you've been here?**

I have no idea; it never occurred to me to try to count them. We have had several donations. The largest one, and the most fun one, was a donation of Victorian and Edwardian ladies' underclothes. So right away, thanks to Deborah (Jurist, President of the GHS) we did a display, and everybody loved it. That was a significant donation.

Except for four military uniforms, we don't have many men's things at all. I'm not sure, but I think it's probably because men's work clothes wore out and probably weren't worth saving. And most men probably only had one suit for their lifetime. That wouldn't have been true for everybody, but for the farming community it probably was—they were married in their suit; it was for Sunday; it was for meetings or going to court or going to somebody else's wedding or whatever. And they were probably buried in their suits. We have a couple of men's vests, but we don't have men's suits. It's women's clothes, some really adorable little girls' things. I don't think we have anything for little boys. And we

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**“Phyllis Burke,” cont.**

have some baby things. And accessories: hats and aprons and stockings and shoes.

Someone donated a very sweet little child’s petticoat made out of wool that was embroidered around the bottom—machine embroidered, even. That’s a reminder that it was cold enough that people needed wool petticoats. Hats—somebody donated a collection of 1950’s women’s hats. I think, well, it won’t be long until those are “vintage.” I think about how quickly, so quickly, people—or young people—are collecting things that I wore in high school.

**How have you worked with the collection?**

Mostly, it’s been a matter of going through what was here. I had the help of Lise Shallberg, who was the corresponding secretary of the GHS at the time. And Deborah has helped. Lise’s husband, Mark, fixed up the closet in the west bedroom with bars so that we were able to hang many things—we call it the “Shallberg Closet.” Lise obtained good hangers on Amazon and a lot of tissue paper for us. She also tracked down old cotton sheets to use as dust and sun covers and found a fabulous, historically correct woman’s mannequin torso. But there’s a lot to be done.

In 2021 I attended the Vermont Historical Society workshop “Care of Textiles” with Collections Manager Teresa Greene. She had helpful ideas about identifying things using little paper tags on strings to write whatever you know about the garment. And Deborah and I photographed things. We need to get the photos all together sometime.

**I see you’ve acquired quite a few mannequins—or “womannequins,” as you like to call some of them. What’s the story behind that?**

What a windfall! The mannequins, originally from a department store in Boston, are a donation from Groton’s new librarian, Sarah Spira, and her husband, Terrence Curran. It was an offer beyond our wildest dreams.

Some of the oldest clothing at the Peter Paul House has been carefully displayed for years on dress forms. But the addition of these mostly women’s and two men’s mannequins



**The GHS is happy to have acquired these mannequin torsos, a gift from Terrence and Sarah Spira. Now, clothing can be stored and exhibited more effectively. Several of the mannequins will need some body sculpting, as women—and men—were smaller in all dimensions back in the day.**

will allow us to display more of our large collection, permanently or for special exhibits. The mannequins are high quality, on strong, interchangeable stands, and vary slightly in size. Thank you, Sarah and Terrence!

**When you have a donation, do you sit down with the donor and talk to them about the family and when or why the piece was worn?**

Yes, I do. The Historical Society votes on whether or not to accept every donation. So, in order to present that, you need to give people enough of an idea of what the object is and why it’s important for Groton to have it. If the vote is yes, then there’s an intake form, and it gets signed by the donor.

Then, if the donor hasn’t identified it, I try to figure out what the material is and a date for it, which sometimes I can guess and sometimes I can’t. I use my reference books for that. I worked at Dartmouth for a while, and I was able to audit a theater costume course with Margaret Spicer for a whole year. It was wonderful. When she did her section on historical clothing, she

recommended going to original sources, finding photographs or paintings if the period is before photographs, so I try to do that. But I’m not sure I’m always correct, which is why I’m hoping that someone can come from the Vermont Historical Society to help us with that.

**Let’s talk about storage. What do you want to do—or to avoid—when you’re storing clothing or textiles you care about keeping for future generations?**

You want to avoid paper, cardboard, wire hangers—storing textiles in or on any material that isn’t inert. Dampness, which can lead to mildew. Light—especially sunlight—can cause damage. We wash our hands frequently when we handle the clothes.

**Tell me a bit about the wedding dress exhibit; how did that come about?**

We have five wedding dresses. Four of them are identified; one is a mystery. I’ve always thought it would be fun to display them. Last year, a woman who moved to Groton from Ryegate told me she wanted to donate a photo of

*Continued on p. 8*



**“Phyllis Burke,” cont.**

her Groton grandparents and their large, framed wedding certificate. The certificate is in a beautiful frame. I thought, if we had a display and exhibit with the dresses, it could draw attention to families in the area. So, I guess her donation was the seed. And we have a framed certificate for another couple in Groton. It’s interesting, because it shows that in a time when people didn’t have their own cameras, this was a way to commemorate the wedding.

Weddings were a really big deal. For people to have created wedding dresses was unusual. Often, people were just married in their very best clothes. Why would you go to the trouble and expense of creating a garment that was only going to be used for one day? A couple of these dresses were homemade, and they’re just lovely.

**Did you make your own wedding dress?**

I did.

**What do you hope to accomplish with this exhibit?**

I’m hoping people will come forward with photographs to go with the dresses, so we can bring the grooms into the story and also tie them into the local families. So many families here are descended from families who have been here for a long time, and they’re very much interrelated, and that’s kind of fun, too.

I hope people will enjoy the exhibit and see it the way I see it, as moments in history.

## Here Comes the Groton Family Weddings Exhibit!

Our wonderful clothing collection at the Peter Paul House includes five wedding dresses donated by Groton families; two from different generations of the same family. Barbara Vance’s donation last year of a large, framed wedding certificate and photo of her grandparents planted the seed for the idea of a wedding themed exhibit. Displayed in the front parlor of the Peter Paul House, it will be ready for our open house on August 26, and for Fall Foliage Days on October 7.

The wedding dresses span the period from 1891 to the early 1940’s. They not only represent the most important events in Groton families’ lives, but reflect the rapid change in women’s clothing styles during that period. To enhance the exhibit and include the grooms (who usually got by with their one “go to meeting” suit), we are hoping to display photos of the couples along with the bride’s dresses.

***If you have a photo you would be willing to let us copy, please contact us at [grotonvthistory@gmail.com](mailto:grotonvthistory@gmail.com).***

**If anyone has a photo of the following couples, either at the time of their wedding or later in life, we would love to copy it. Our dresses are from the weddings of:**

\*Lydia Jane Ricker and James Herbert Smith, August 5, 1891

\*Their daughter, Jessie May Smith to Ralph Butler Foster, April 29, 1914

\*Ida M. Martin to Herman Ricker, August 1900

\*Bessie A. Blanchard to Harry T. Morrison, 1912

Do you recognize this fifth dress, made in the 1940’s in New York City? We cannot find a record of who donated it or who wore it.



## Summer/Fall 2023

**JULY****11<sup>th</sup> : Public Annual Membership Meeting, 6 p.m.**

- Election of Officers
- Review of Articles of Incorporation
- “Bristol Bill and his Gang of Counterfeiters”–Deborah Jurist

**AUGUST****5<sup>th</sup>: Open House, 9:30 a.m. to noon****26<sup>th</sup>: Open House, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

- Groton Family Weddings exhibit–Phyllis Burke
- “Sleeping Sentinel”–Deborah Jurist

**OCTOBER****7<sup>th</sup>: Fall Foliage Day Open House, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

We will repeat the program from August 26<sup>th</sup>

*If you would like to see what’s been updated in the GHS Articles of Association, here are links for both sets:*

**New**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-L8Aje5kDabAKcOr3vU48JE6Q0rL15ke6CPyQ4LGDww/edit>

**Old**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qVOcYNr5PfBLrYK4gSjv9ZZ8nSpDGWYOGTG8x99W5ho/edit?pli=1>



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