

Franconia Heritage News



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October 2016

The Village House

The property at 651 Main Street, known as the Village House for the last 50 years, can be traced back to when it was the Barrett farm. Lemuel Barrett, a Revolutionary War soldier from Lancaster MA, is listed in the Franconia 1800 census. In 1819, at the age of 58, he applied for a war pension, stating that his dwelling house had burnt down in April 1804 and

he was in “reduced circumstances & stand in need of assistance from my Country for support.” In 1827 he was able to purchase 33 1/3 acres from Priest Young. To that he added three parcels of adjoining land in 1829 and another tract in 1831 for a total of about 60 acres. The current Village House structure, including the attached barn, has been expanded and renovated many times over the years. The original house portion no doubt was built by or for Lemuel who died in 1846. His widow Phoebe, with the help of her son Jacob Burnham from her first marriage, kept the farm going until 1853 when it was sold to John Bowles.

John Bowles in turn sold it a year later to Joseph Watson who owned and occupied his homestead farm for the next 28 years. The 1860 agricultural census lists his crops as Indian corn, oats, Irish potatoes, buckwheat, 500 lbs. butter, 10 tons hay, and 50 lbs. of maple syrup.

Robert Petrie bought the farm in 1882. He was a blacksmith and horse-shoer by trade; his son Albert ran the farm. The old blacksmith building still on Main Street, now leaning precariously towards the Gale River, used to be on the other side of the road and was his shop. After Mr. Petrie died in 1892, the “Petrie Place” frequently changed hands: to Silas Nute, followed by Henry Noyes, Henry Clark, Hollis Godard and Waldo Taylor in 1906.

Waldo Taylor farmed the property until 1920 when he sold it to his son Silas. The farm was now about 55 acres, the boundaries having been altered several times. Silas owned the farm for 33 years, the longest ownership to date. In 1928 he remodeled the house: enlarging the veranda, building a sleeping porch across one end, and adding a fireplace. His 1964 obituary in *The Littleton Courier* stated that “Mr. Taylor was a farmer in the early days and came to Franconia some 60 years ago. He was employed at the Profile Farm for a time and then drove the stage from Franconia to Littleton for George Lurvey for several years. He became the rural delivery mail carrier and served in that capacity for some 30 years, retiring in 1956 due to ill health.” Two of his children stayed in Franconia, Bertha married Don Eastman and Myrtle married Austin Macaulay. Silas was the last to farm on this



Johnstone's Coffee Shop c. 1960 postcard printed by Merrimack Postcard Co.

property. Interstate 93, which opened in 1959, went right through the crop fields behind the houses and barns on Main Street., also cutting off access to pasture lands and tree lots.

In 1953 Osman and Margaret Johnstone from Tom's River NJ acquired a portion of the property from the Taylors. They turned part of the expanded farmhouse into a restaurant called Johnstone's Coffee Shop. When Osman became ill in 1960, Louis and Leona Thompson took over the manage-

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The Village House continued

ment. They served breakfast, lunch and dinner with homemade pastries and bread.

Walter and Gertrude Geswell of Wilmington MA acquired the restaurant in 1964 and renamed it the Village House Restaurant. They expanded the enterprise to a seating capacity of 120 which included a breakfast room, two dining rooms and the Tack Room Lounge that offered music entertainment.

The Geswells sold the Village House in December of 1972 to George and Shirley Found who in turn sold it in 1976 to Jack and Carol McGurin who had Franconia ties. Jack had been head waiter at Hillwinds Sirloin Tavern and was a ski instructor at Cannon, and Carol had been a waitress at the Village House. They successfully ran the restaurant and lounge for 14 years until 1990, catering to local residents and skiers, and offering a popular Mexican food night.

The Village House suffered for a few years in the early 1990's under Stephanie Martini of Boston before being purchased by the Fullertons, Philip and Carol and their son Robert who was the chef. They brought the restaurant back to life, offering specials to their patrons, for about a dozen years, before selling to Ronald and Jennifer Ingerson of Lancaster in 2005 who called the establishment the Farmhouse Restaurant and Tavern. Their ownership ended a few years later in foreclosure. The Village House name returned in 2008, and it is currently the headquarters of Chef Joe's Catering owned by Joe and Nancy Peterson.



The Village House in 1987 under the ownership of Jack and Carol McGurin.



Chef Joe's Catering in the Village House 2010.

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DID YOU KNOW that before electricity, some elevators were powered by water pressure that turned wheels attached to the elevator cables? This apparently was the case within the large Profile House resort that once was located in Franconia Notch.

“Mr. Greenleaf (owner) is having 2” pipes laid from Lafayette Falls to the Profile House, nearly two miles, to carry water to run the passenger elevator, which extends from the main entrance up into the attic.”

(as reported in the *Littleton Journal* July 20, 1883)

DID YOU KNOW that part of Main Street, between what is now Wallace Hill Road and Forest Hill Road/Rte 142, used to be called Elm Street on account of the lovely elm trees along the way? Wallace Hill Road was once called Breakneck Hill Road because of the sharp curve. Profile Road/Rte. 18 was called Three Mile Hill Road. Before they started naming the Franconia roads, they were referred to in deeds as: the highway leading through Franconia Village; the highway leading from the Meeting House to the Gale River Bridge so called; the road leading from the Furnace buildings of the NH Iron Factory Co. to the Notch of the Franconia Mountains; the highway leading from Franconia Village to the Profile House; the road leading from the Meeting House in Franconia over Wallace Hill.

Those Were The Days

Winter remembrances of Wayne Blodgett (1927-2005)
from an interview in 1995:

We skated up and down the (Gale) river. We used to look forward to the January thaw when the water would run over the ice and freeze again. We could go up and down the river for two or three miles in either direction. We used to have a lot of fun. That was nothing unusual to see a gang of kids skating down the river. They don't seem to do that anymore. I don't know why. We either skated under the bridge where there was no snow, or waited til the water ran over the ice and froze again.

My first skis – I think I was about seven or eight – they were made of pine. I had leather bindings, and we did a lot of skiing on them. Of course they didn't have steel edges back then, and of course we wore the sides off round, so it got so they weren't too maneuverable but we outgrew them by the time they got worn out. Then my Dad ran a ski shop for several years. Repaired skis. Put on steel edges. All that sort of thing. Used to do that in the evening at home. The room he worked in, we called the ski room for years and years.

I taught skiing over at Cannon for four or five winters in the early 50's. For the most part that was quite enjoyable, but every now and then you run into somebody that kind of takes the joy out of it. For the most part – except for one lady that got a little peeved at me because I wouldn't pick her up every time she fell down.

I can remember climbing Cannon race course – three or four times in one day, not clear to the top. I think I was in 7th or 8th grade the first time I ever skied Cannon. I didn't mind it so much going up, but when I looked down that mountain the first time, I thought to myself, what have I gotten myself into? After you got going, it was just so easy you didn't think twice about it, but that first time down was kind of a thrill.

A lot of times some of us younger guys would hitch-hike up to Cannon, or Jere Chase (Dow coach) would take us up, like on a Saturday. Those first days were a lot different than it is today, I'll tell you. Cannon trail came right straight out on what used to be the top of Three Mill Hill. There was no parking lot. We skied right down to the highway. Of course it was nowhere near as wide as it is now. The last half of it down the mountain, I don't think it was more than maybe 25 feet wide anywhere. But we enjoyed it.

Childhood recollections of Archie Herbert (1914-2008)
from a 2002 interview:

We lived on Coal Hill Road. Where my house was, it had three branches to it. One went to the left, which is now a ski hotel; another one went up to the Nelson house; and the other one on the right hand side went through to the Profile Golf Club – now McGowan Hill Road but it doesn't go through now. We lived right at the base of McGowan. The house is still there. I can remember where now it is all woods, it used to be all fields. My grandfather used to hay it – he had a small farm.

Route 18, which was a main route, was a dirt road at that time. I can remember when it was first tarred. They used to put a pile of sand on each side of the highway, maybe 25 feet apart and then run what they called tar over it – it was a liquid. They had men that would spread that sand in the tar. That's how they did it at the beginning.

There were very few cars at that time. I can remember when you couldn't go through Franconia Notch, only by walking. It wasn't plowed out in the winter time like it is today. When they first started opening the notch, you used to have many men would go up there with shovels and shovel their way through. That's the way they did it. They had vehicles at that time but they couldn't go through the notch. So they had to shovel a path so they could go through. I can't remember that they rolled the notch road. You went on horseback or foot. I guess people in Franconia didn't want to go – it wasn't necessary to go. If they shopped they went to Boston – they could go to Littleton and get the train. So no reason to go through the notch, and of course, we never had the tourists like we have today. That came much later. There were a few stage coaches.

Farming was the predominant profession when I was growing up. There were a few private homes who would take in guests, probably for all summer long, like Elizabeth's mother and father at the Mountain View House.

Where Bill Heath's store is, Franconia Village Store, was a place where they shod horses – a blacksmith shop. I can remember my grandfather – he had two horses – taking them down there and putting new shoes on.

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Time to renew your membership for the year October 2016 to October 2017
Please show your support by returning the enclosed remittance envelope. Thank you.

Annual Meeting and Dinner — Wednesday November 16, 2016 at the Dutch Treat

6:00 Meeting 6:30 Social 7:00 Dinner

Meeting

Two items are on the agenda this year:

- (1) Ratification by members of the amended FAHC By-Laws
- (2) Vote to elect officers for the 2016-2017 season. The proposed slate is: Nancy Heinemann Pres., Barbara Holt VP, Phil Krill Treasurer; Dot Wiggins Recording Secretary; Kay Whitcomb Corresponding Secretary

Copies of the amended By-Laws can be obtained at the Selectmen's Office in the Town Hall.

Dinner

\$30.00 per person (includes tax and tip)

Entrée choices: beef, chicken, salmon

All drinks to be paid separately by recipient.

Please RSVP by November 10th by mailing your check made out to Phil Krill, to:
Phil Krill, Box 136, Franconia NH 03580

Be sure to state your dinner choice.

Everyone is welcome!



A welcome addition to Franconia this summer were the flags along Main Street.

