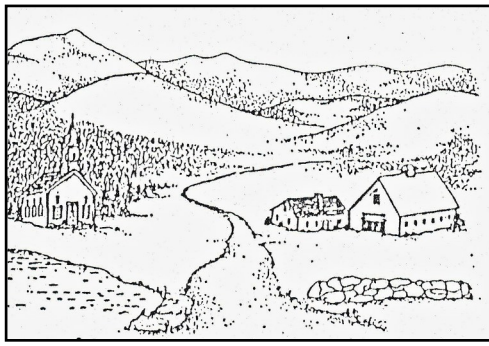
Issue 143 March 2025



Chatham Times Past and Present

Log House Designs

Written by Jeanne Eastman with information from Kenyon King's talk in 2020 and excerpts from Karen Cummings' 1982 article in The Mountain Ear

In the early 1960s, while still in high school, Kenyon King came with his parents to look at a cottage for sale on Butter Hill Road. They were greeted with a big "Welcome, welcome!" by neighbor, Everett Eastman, who launched into local stories from his tractor and then invited them for biscuits and gravy. The Kings bought the cottage.

Joy and Kenyon King

Several years later, Kenyon and his wife, Joy, came to live at the cottage. They decided to build a log cabin on the property, though they had no building experience or equipment. Using the set of ox cart wheels from Everett's field and their VW bus, they moved logs into place. Wayne McAllister gave Kenyon immediate permission to borrow the North Chatham fire truck to add water to the cement for the piers. A long plastic tube filled with water was their level. Step by step, Kenyon and Joy figured it out.

What next? Kenyon was 26 years old. He'd been to the South Pole, been an Outward Bound instructor, and climbed tall peaks in Alaska. It didn't feel right to go get a job "just to work." Kenyon spent weeks on the couch in the loft reading books and magazines, looking for inspiration. Meanwhile, Joy, patiently and joyfully, got a job waitressing at Evergreen Valley Resort in Stoneham, Maine.

Joy King Modeling Gear

Joy saw in an Eddie Bauer catalog a cargo bag stuff sack. It was made of corduroy with a zipper at the top. You could stuff a sleeping bag inside it, making a pillow. So Kenyon bought some fabric and zippers, and Joy sewed a cargo bag. Kenyon took it to the new IME (International Mountain Equipment) store in North Conway where he'd made friends with the founders and asked if they'd like to buy some. "OK, we'll take half a dozen." That was the first key turning point - they'd made a sale!

Then a sports store in Lewiston Auburn asked them to make nylon covers for foam mattresses, which was another turning point – someone *asking* them to make something. Outward Bound asked them to make rain jackets. To get a pattern,

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Notes from the President

We have been enjoying winter here in Chatham. It's been cold, though not like in 1935 when the men of the CCC camp were building the road over Evans Notch in -54 degree weather; snowy, but not like 1968 when around 200 inches of snow fell over the winter; windy, but not like the gales that blew the snow into drifts that stopped horse & sleigh traffic in 1872 or that blew the "Summit House" off Kearsarge in 1916.

Special thanks to Margery Eastman and Gail Calomb for their steady help during our "Open Hours" Tuesday mornings. We have been arranging photos and paintings for display on our new wall space, and also filling our new display case from Armond Pepin's store. Thanks to Alan Eastman for keeping us plowed out. Welcome to new members, Sue Hamlin and John Kriz!

We had a nice gathering for a potluck supper in conjunction with Carols and Candles at the Church just before Christmas, and for another potluck with our bonfire in February. We were glad to see new families as well as the regulars. We have many good cooks in the neighborhood! Thanks to Dale McClure for providing the fire.

We have some excellent programs on our schedule for the year. Mark your calendars! We hope to see you there!

Jeanne Eastman

Upcoming Events

March Maple Weekend at Nate and Kate's Maple. We will be selling chili. Date TBD

May 3, 10 AM – New England Hillside farms and how geopolitical events factored into their evolution "Not as brainy as it sounds!" says presenter, Peter Benson of Jackson, NH. We will meet at 585 Butter Hill.

June 21, 7:00 PM – Wit and Wisdom: The Forgotten Literary Life of New England Villages, with Jo Radner. Jo has done extensive research on lyceums, (19th century community events to improve the mind) which started with cleaning out her grandparent's house in Fryeburg and ended with a wonderful book. Since then we have found a lyceum paper from South Chatham in our collection.

Contact Us

1061 Main Road; Chatham, NH 03813
chathamnhhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
www.chathamhistoricalnh.org

Board Meetings

April – October, 3rd Tuesday, 6:30 PM

Open Hours

Tuesdays 9 – Noon
We look forward to seeing you!

Board of Directors

President, Jeanne Eastman
Vice President, Sheryl Emery
Treasurer, Beverly Aiman
Secretary, Maria Palmisano
Directors, Steve Eastman
Gail Calomb
Alan Eastman
Paul Loscocco
Curator: Margery Eastman

Donations

Thank you for your generous support!

Tom Henriksen: an old photo of an old Chatham house; **Ellie Eastman**: photos and news clippings to copy; **Greg Thurston**: Jonah Hill, Jr.'s ledger from his carding mill 1860-1880, book on dying fabrics, and deeds; **Steve Eastman**: glass negatives of North Chatham scenes 1922; **Cindy Butters**: photos relating to Pepin's Store at Stow Corner; **Gail Calomb** and **Margery Eastman**: items for improving museum displays. Monetary donations: **Gail McSherry, Fran West & Roberta Stack, Elizabeth Adams, Sandra Nager, Deborah Mann, Sue & Mike Zlogar, Margery Eastman, Greg Thurston, Brenda & John Chandler, Dana Ranta, Frank & Margaret Lunn, Jo Radner, Thomas Hennessey, Jim & Denise Stanford, Kate Kane, Susie Eastman.** In Memory of Albert Stearns: **Steve & Jeanne Eastman, Neil & Donna Wilson, Rondi Stearns & Stanley Tupaj**.

In Memory

Our deepest sympathy to the families of these loved ones:

Albert Stearns, 90; passed away December 1, 2024. Al worked as a master electrician in Charlestown, NH, but his growing up and retirement years were spent in West Lovell, ME, looking at Baldface Mountain where his grandfather, Orlando Allard, had worked as a teamster hauling granite slabs down during the winters. Al was a member of CHS and a veteran of the US Marine Corps.

Alton Lovell, 87; passed away December 6, 2024. Al work for the Hanover, MA police department for twelve years. He lived for many years in Stow and served as Road Agent. He was track supervisor at Fryeburg Fair for 35 years, and built a horse exercise track at his home. In 1983 Al convinced 18 of his neighbors to pitch in $25 each to start the Stow Volunteer Fire Department.

Heather Drew, 55, Stow; passed away December 6, 2024. Heather loved spending time with her family and helping anyone. She also loved to garden, cook, and go for long drives with her husband, Carl.

Pauline (Emerson) Libby, 105; passed away December 15, 2024. Pauline grew up in Chatham. She worked for the New Hampshire Department of Welfare. She enjoyed working for local community organizations and helping the less fortunate. In December, as the oldest person in Conway, she received the Boston Post Cane.

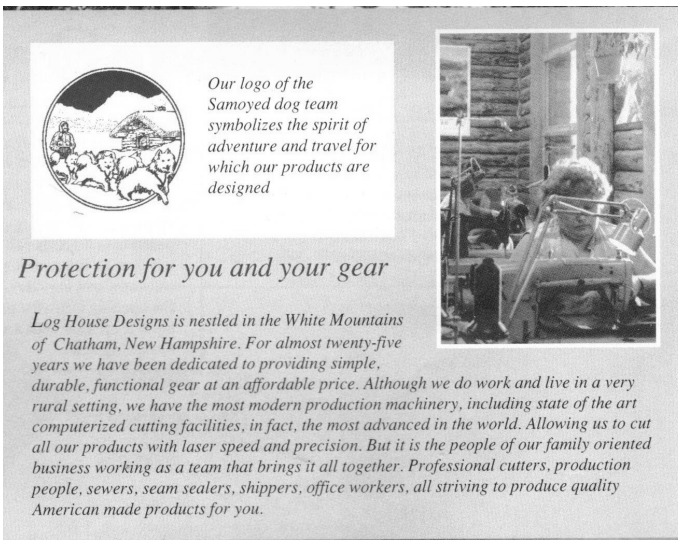
Douglas Beaton, 82; passed away January 3. Doug was a cranberry grower on Cape Cod and was on the Board of Ocean Spray for 14 years as well as on Boards for other cranberry grower organizations. He also served as trustee at several hospitals near his home. He'd been coming to his camp in Chatham since 1959, where he loved hunting, mowing his fields, and visiting neighbors. He was a CHS member.

Alden Brown, Sr., Stow; passed away January 9. Al retired to Stow in 2006 after a career with NH Fish and Game. He enjoyed hunting, gardening, and feeding the birds, and would help anyone.

Ralph Guptill, 92, Fryeburg; passed away January 12. Ralph was the third generation of Guptills to live in the Cold River Valley. He worked 25 years for the Maine DOT, and then worked for Ossipee Oil, Bailey Manufacturing, and NAPA. Ralph served in the Army during the Korean War. He was Post Commander of VFW Post 6783. He was also a long-time member of CHS.

"Log House Designs" continued from page 1

they bought a Frostline kit, traced the patterns onto newspaper, cut the fabric by hand, and Joy sewed them. The jackets stood the test on Outward Bound trips and Kenyon was then "on fire" thinking of all the things he and Joy could make.

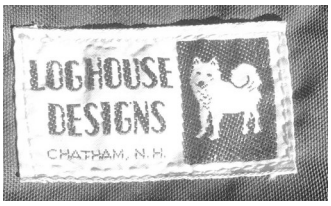


A catalog advertisement depicting Gwen Tarbell sewing

Kenyon went to the owner of Concord Sports in Massachusetts, an importer of Norway skis. The owner said they needed gators and fanny packs. "How many?" 2000 gators and 1000 fanny packs! Kenyon went home to tell Joy, "Good news and bad! We got an order. I have no idea how we'll make it!"

Kenyon and Joy decided they needed help. Their first employee was Gwen Tarbell of Stow, who sewed in their little cabin. Then her daughter, Susie, and Valerie Wilfong came to sew. Soon there were six women sewing in the little cabin. Fabric and sewing machines were everywhere, except in their son, Eric's bedroom. The cabin was rather dark and crowded.

Kenyon and Joy decided they needed commercial machines. Kenyon bought three at $200 each from a shoe shop in Auburn Lewiston. He got them into the loft, only to find that the plug didn't fit the electrical outlet; the machines needed three-phase power and the closest three-phase power was at the shoe shop in Fryeburg. Harland Ladd at the Fryeburg shoe shop bought the machines and sold Kenyon some that used 110 power. Harland also taught them how to adjust and fix machines, rescuing them from several dilemmas.



The Samoyed Dog Logo

Then, friend and fellow outdoor enthusiast, Peter Quesada, stopped by to show Kenyon a new fabric, a Gortex coat he'd used on an expedition in Nepal. He demonstrated by pumping water and soaking the coat. The water shed off and the coat remained fluffy. But Gortex was expensive at $6 per yard. When Kenyon took a $26 Gortex coat to a show, who would buy it when a regular coat could be purchased for $6? It was a big thing when Campmor bought some of their Gortex jackets.

Though money was coming in, it was all going right back into the business. Log House Designs (LHD), as they'd named the business, needed to get their product in more stores. They built a larger log shop next door and looked for more orders. At this time, Allegheny Air had a deal: for a set price you could take as many flights to as many cities as you could do in one week. Kenyon got on the plane with the goal to sell to at least one store in each city in which he stopped. Arriving in a city he'd take a cab or bus to the downtown area, go to stores until he received an order, and then return to the airport and take the next flight out.

Kenyon King at Log House Designs

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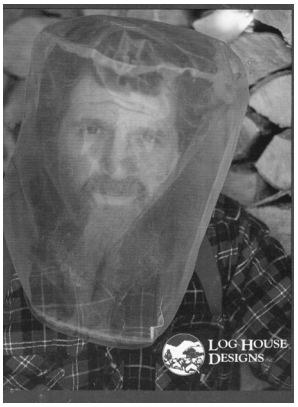
"Log House Designs" continued from page 4

The next step in their expansion was to attend the big outdoor equipment trade show in Las Vegas. It took all their on-hand capital to buy a plane ticket and rent a booth. With no extra money, Kenyon camped on the golf course that first show, and he wrote enough orders to pay for the trip.

By now, LHD was employing more than twenty women to sew for them. Some worked in the shop, and some sewed at home. When LHD started making the popular Baby Bags, they bought the old Odd Fellows building on Route 5 in Fryeburg Center. They were sewing for L.L. Bean, EMS, the Baby Bag Company – it was hard to keep up with the orders. They were making an insulated covering for downhill ski boots. They made Goretex coats for the US Air Force Band. They made turn-out gear bags for Saco Valley Fire Department and coats for Fryeburg Rescue. They made bug suits and head nets. They made jackets for snow-making crews. They made dog beds, log carriers, and covers for hang-gliders.



Frank Eastman

Their employees made a great team, willing to work extra to get orders out on time. There was a sense of "let's get it done!" At a time when there were not so many jobs for women in this area, Log House Designs employed more than one hundred and fifty people, mostly women, over the years, from Chatham, Stow, Lovell, Fryeburg, Bridgton, Bethel, and Hiram. Some worked at home, some at the Chatham shop, and some at the Fryeburg outlet. LHD could be responsive to their customers' needs and were as modern as technology allowed.

In the midst of this busy business, there was great sadness when Joy died in 1986. Kenyon says, "Joy was the driving force. If it hadn't been for her, Log House Designs would never have existed." Joy had started a "Little Hiker" line of products, which was discontinued with her death. The LHD team rallied and carried on with Janice Purslow as manager.

Logo for the Little Hiker line

The following year, an addition was built on the shop. LHD now had an automated cutting machine which required the installation of a generator and air compressors to supply the 3-phase power necessary. Multiple stacked layers of expensive fabric were laid out on the cutting table and all cut at once. The cutter had to be very precise. Kenyon didn't want to hear, "Whoops!"


The New Shop

Then one day, one of their wholesale customers called to say, "We are not going to order any more. We can get the items much cheaper from South Korea." This was a harbinger of things to come. Within three years, EMS and Campmor were having items made in Asia, and the Baby Bags Co. had gone to South Carolina. LHD went from 46 employees to a very small group. For a while Kenyon added DVD rentals at the Fryeburg shop, but that closed too in 2012. Kenyon is proud of all the LHD products they made. They were basic, durable, functional, and high quality. He also really enjoyed all the people who worked for him over the years.

The Peddler's Peck

A bundle of news from the neighbors over the years

Susan (Tarbell) Smith: "I worked for Log House Designs for a year between high school and college. There were 3 or 4 sewing machines in their log house. Kenyon did the cutting in the loft. There was a rope tied to a beam, and he came down on the rope, rather than the stairs. There was no indoor toilet, but an outhouse. In the winter, the toilet seat was hung on a nail behind the wood stove, so you'd take it out with you and have a warm seat. Later, I worked a year sewing at the shop in Fryeburg. I was sewing buckles onto 1-inch wide straps, and was paid 4 cents per strap. Once I figured out better ways, I could work so I'd make $8 per hour. My mother (Gwen Tarbell) worked quite a few years in the log house and then in their new log factory and then bought a machine and sewed at home."

Valerie Wilfong: "I worked in the log cabin. I remember it being COLD and trying to sew fast because I was getting paid by the piece."

Greg Thurston: "The women had carts that they used to move fabric around. There were little scraps of fabric all over the floor, and the wheels would get gummed up so they wouldn't turn. Kenyon would have me fix the wheels. Another time a tiny pin on a machine was lost and I fashioned a new one."

Peter Quesada: "Kenyon is an imaginative innovator, doing things before they were cool, like jogging the ridges along the valley. I was inspired by him sea kayaking to Prince William Sound."

Audrey Andrews: "I sewed for Log House Designs for 30 years, until they didn't have more work for me. My mother, Neldora Charles, worked as a home stitcher too. Joy taught us girls to make the items."

Margery Eastman: "We'd walk up Butter Hill Road to go sliding on Kennetts' hill, and the Samoyed puppies from Log House Design followed us. There were 6 or 7 of them. We'd try to get them onto the saucers with us."

Cynthia "Speedy" McAllister: "I did snapping, packing up orders, errands like going to Dexter Shoes to pick up boxes for shipping. I did not sew. When my kids were little, I worked 24 hours at the shop, sometimes in the evenings, and 16 hours at home. My sister, Chris, worked upstairs making phone calls to get orders. I enjoyed working with Lisa Layne and Marsha Smith at the Log House booth at Fryeburg Fair. We sold a lot of dog beds and baby bags there."

Donna Hennessey: I worked off and on over many years, sometimes at night so we didn't need a babysitter. In the beginning, we had only one car, but we had Fred Gould's retired race horse. So I'd ride the horse over to pick up the bag of pieces that I'd bring home to sew.

George Andrews: "I was a toolmaker and also made repairs. One thing was the CNC (computer-numerically-controlled) cutting machine on which 40 layers of fabric were laid out to be cut. The fabric had to be held precisely, and I made the tool to hold it. The embroidering machine also had to hold the fabric very precisely."

Susie Eastman: "Log House Designs was on the cover of a UPS magazine as their most isolated location to deliver to."

Linda Cooper: "I worked at the grommeting machine and packaging up kits that women would take home to sew. They'd be brought back to the shop for seam sealing, and then shipped out."

Frank Eastman: "Kenyon knocked on the door one day. "Can I take your picture?" He took one picture of me wearing his bug net. That picture was posted at L.L.Bean's in Freeport and it was on the Today Show when they were telling what you need to paddle the Colorado River."

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"Peddler's Peck" continued from page 6

Gwen Tarbell, in her April 15, 1993 Stow Town Column: "All of us at work Thursday were busily working away when Speedy suddenly said there's a moose. We looked out the window and a big bull moose was standing on the other side of the road. He looked and looked at the building and finally stepped over the snow bank and walked along in front of our cars and came in the driveway. He got almost to the building and Speedy suddenly remembered the puppy was out so she opened the door and yanked her in. The moose froze in his tracks with one hind leg up and then turned and walked out the driveway and trotted up the road. The poor little puppy was just a shaking and quivering. She lay down on some kit bags by the door and stayed there all morning."

Laurie Crouse: "I worked at Log House for about 5 years. I packed up customers' orders to be shipped out and gave the home stitchers their work. I remember Gwen saying she used to see Kenyon pondering how he was going to afford to buy fabric for an order. By the time I worked there he was buying it by the truck load. I worked there when Gary Wilfong and his company put the addition on the factory and remember them cutting the door in the wall of the old factory with a power saw. Every Wednesday we would have 'goodie day' and would take turns bringing in a dessert to share with everyone."

Gail Calomb: "Jim and I went into the store on Route 5. It must have been the early '90s. There was a mannequin dressed in LDH clothing. We didn't think anything of it... until the mannequin moved! It was Erlon Jones."

Eric King: "When I was old enough to turn on a vacuum cleaner my mom and dad had me cleaning up fabric scraps and loose threads on the floor, and dumping the trash for 35 cents a week! During the summer, guests staying at Cold River Camp would come over to the house, and eventually the shop next door, to buy rain jackets and other items; I got to learn how to be a salesman, as a kid in barefeet, in between playing in the yard with our Samoyeds. Eventually I had a time card and worked my way up to minimum wage taking on additional odd jobs such as putting in grommets in gaiters, cutting webbing for belts, and eventually working at the LHD Outlet in Fryeburg renting VHS movies and video cassette recorder machines as well as selling LHD overstock after school and weekends. Growing up in Chatham in a small primitive hand-hewn log house filled with wonderful ladies and my mother sewing on industrial sewing machines in the living room, fabric being cut by my dad and our Stow bee-keeper friend Gordon Gilman in the loft, and Art the friendly UPS driver with the bushy mustache knocking on our door every evening was definitely a rather unusual life for a kid; we used to have to answer our home phone for as long as I can remember, "Hello, Log House Designs" and hope it was an order! However, I have always appreciated my parents' pioneering spirit and their can-do attitude, and their relentless drive to keep LHD local, supporting the community."

Kenyon King: "Gordon Gilman would sit out on the back deck, in all weather because of the fumes, cutting webbing."

Fran Wilshusen: "I spent the summer of 1982 at my family's place in North Chatham. I believe it was either Walt Charles or Herb Eastman who mentioned "Log House Designs" as a possibility for work. For me, just pulling up in front of the place was inspiring: a log structure built in amongst the pines, with elevated wood plank walkways to enter. Inside were workstations, a large cutting table, shipping desk and an office. Rolls of fabric, scraps of fabric, polyester stuffing, YKK zippers, and spindles of thread filled this amazing workshop at the edge of the dirt road. Kenyon gave me a job at the recently purchased Odd Fellows building on Route 5. I was to help organize the sales floor, be on site for customers, work as cashier and lots of related odd jobs. Upstairs were several sewing stations. Audrey, Bonnie and others worked on sewing stuff sacks, jackets, vests, and baby bags. One of the things that was so amazing to me were the many rolls of labels next to the sewing machines: L.L. Bean, EMS, Campmor and others. Kenyon would spend some part of many a day repairing and maintaining sewing machines. Joy sometimes came in to help too, showing us how to put finishing touches like zipper pulls, barrel locks, and draw cords on products. I got to meet neighbors that I never knew before as they brought in baskets and boxes full of LHD products they had sewn at home."

Chatham Historical Society
1061 Main Road
Chatham, NH 03813

Dues and Donations

Chatham Historical Society is a non-profit 501(C)3 Charitable Organization
1061 Maine Road, Chatham, NH 03813

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☐ I'd like to pay my membership dues: ☐ $10/year ☐ $100/lifetime

☐ I'd like to make a donation: $_____ ☐ General

☐ Building Fund

☐ Award Fund for HS Seniors

☐ $150 Paver with Veteran's Name

☐ Purchases, Raffle Tickets, etc. $_____Description_____

Total Enclosed: $ _____

☐ I'd like to be contacted for more information.