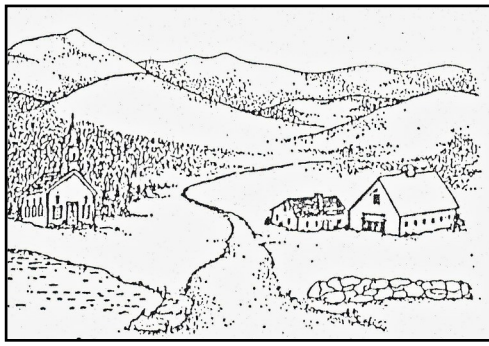
Issue 144 September 2025



Chatham Times
Past and Present

Hillside Farms

From our May 2025 Program by Peter Benson
Summarized by Jeanne Eastman

Before European colonists began settling in the area of Chatham and the surrounding hillsides, the Pequawket people used this area for hunting and traveling the rivers and through the notches. The nearby mountains were called "the home of the Great Spirit," and the people traveled through the area but did not stay. They grew corn on the intervales of Fryeburg, spent the summers fishing near the coast, and moved north to St. Francis in the winters.

In 1725 a raiding party of colonists from Dover and Rochester came to Fryeburg with the intent to kill Indians, each scalp earning a bounty of 100 pounds (a lot of money!). There was a pitched battle at Lovewell's Pond, after which the Pequawkets dispersed, never to come back.

Home of Willie Hanscom

The French and Indian War ended in the British victory in 1763. This opened up the wilderness land for colonization, with taxes on the colonists to pay for the war. Between 1770 and 1800, huge land grants were made to soldiers and officers. The best land went first to more prosperous people, and the hills of Chatham were settled by poor folks. The land was cheap, but they were expected to plant ten acres in a short time. Advantages of a farm on the hillsides were cleaner water and a longer growing season since the cold air settled in the valley. Dysentery was a concern, and water was not used for drinking. Cider and "small" beer were consumed, even by children.

A settler could clear two to three acres in a year, by chopping trees down. He made a small shelter with logs. He used his oxen to pull the stumps from the ground and pulled them into a line to make a stump fence, or he burned them. The many rocks would have broken a plow, so he poked seeds into the ground between stumps and rocks. As time allowed, he created a cellar hole, with an ox pulling a scoop that moved dirt and rocks up an earthen ramp. He dry-laid field stones for the cellar walls and erected a small log house above. Now the oxen and perhaps a milk cow could shelter in the first structure. He cut meadow grass with a scythe and piled it outside where it had been mowed. Later in winter, when it was easier to haul with a sled, he brought it to the barn.

Fred Meader with a team of oxen, 1937

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Notes from the President

We have had a busy, productive summer. Thank you to all who volunteered to help, especially to our regular Tuesday morning volunteers, Margery and Gail, and to Becky Knowles who has offered her time and skills just when we needed them!

In June, Jo Radner's talk on lyceums was based on her book, Wit and Wisdom: The Forgotten Literary Life of New England Villages. She did extra research and tailored the talk to give special attention to the South Chatham lyceum paper from 1880 that we found in our collection. The talk was well attended and very interesting.

We held an Art Show in July, with over 40 artists represented, including famous local painters from the past, current artists, and a kids section with first works of future artists. July 26 we also held a craft fair, with local artisans selling tied flies, maple syrup, jewelry, knitted and sewed items, metal sculptures, stone bird baths, and fresh blueberries and duck eggs. Margery Eastman did a great job chairing the event. Thanks to Alina Eastman for tips of organizing a craft fair. It was a fun time, and we hope to do it again.

We participated in the Summer Bazaar in Fryeburg, selling food, raffle tickets, and Chatham goods. It was a super hot day. Thank you Beverly Aiman and Gail Calomb for organizing our table.

August also saw our annual Ice Cream Social which this year featured the Story of David Crouse's Life, told by Jim Wilfong. Thank you, Ann Fargo, for chairing the event and donating the sundae supplies. Thanks to everyone who helped out. David's 99th issue of the Cold River Chronicle was printed before he passed. We made it available at this event to anyone who wanted a copy. If you would like one, please let us know and send $2 for the postage and handling.

A few additional notes. We now have internet service at our building. It was installed just in time for credit card sales to be possible at the Craft Fair. And please note that the program on Molly Ockett will not be happening this September. We hope to reschedule for the spring. Welcome to our newest member, Fran Wilshusen!

Jeanne Eastman

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

The Peddler's Peck

A bundle of news from the neighbors over the years

George Andrews: Sheep cleared this valley. Millard Chandler had a photo showing the view from his house all the way to Stow Corner.

From **Edifying,** by Edward Jones: (from an unidentified source) For many years Jonah Hill ran a fulling and carding mill at his place in Chatham. We used to bring our wool to be carded into rolls for spinning in the spring, then later we made another trip to get the rolls. Then after mother had done up all the spinning and weaving for our yearly supply of clothing for the family, a third trip was made to have the fulling done. Later on, a fourth trip was made to bring home the cloth now all ready for the tailor, who was usually the good mistress of the household, for all our clothing and linen was homespun and homemade. (The carding mill operated 1810-1910.)

from **William D. Emerson His Life and Times 1819-1894**, by Doris Emerson Brannen: Almon, most skilled with the scythe, struck out and laid the first swarth, followed by the others in safe clearing distance....they continued their even progress across the meadow, pausing only to whet their scythes to greater sharpness grown dull by the coarse grass.

Michael Davis, In Ye Olden Times column in the Bridgton News: Before the Civil War most farmers in New England grew their hay in fields, hemmed in by rock walls, the size a farmer could harvest in a day, scythe in hand. After the war, horse-drawn mowing machines arrived. When using a scythe, the farmer could cut right into the corners of the fields. With the horse-drawn equipment, he had to begin turning well in advance of the corners, leaving portions of each small field unreachable.

From the **Oxford Democrat,** November 1, 1881: Chatham and Stow Fair: ...Greatest Variety Apples – Leonard Emerson, 25 varieties, 1st; Almon Emerson, 12 varieties, 2nd; Stephen Chandler, 9 varieties, 3rd; Horace Chandler, 2 varieties.

American Farm Bureau Federation: In the early days of our nation, 90-95% of the people lived on farms. By 1863, 80% of the population was on a farm; by 1900, it was just under 40%, and in 1950, 20% lived on farms. The trajectory continues, with now less than 2% farming.

Chatham Town Records: 1812: 40 families. 28 horses 5 yrs old. 1 horse 4 years old. 2 horses 3 years old. 3 horses 2 years old. 45 oxen 5 years old. 10 oxen 4 years old. 82 cows. 26 neat stock 3 years old. 37 neat stock 2 years old. (no sheep listed) 2 ½ acres arable land. 17 acres mowing land. 2758 acres wild land. 2 mills. **1840:** 96 families. 76 horses, 89 oxen, 141 cows, 109 neat stock, 513 sheep. (Two families had 25 sheep, one had 24, one had 20, twelve had 6. The fewest was 2. They were valued at $1.00 per. One person's 7 cows were worth $75.00. Another's 8 were $88.00. Those were the only "large" herds.) **1920:** 57 families. 91 horses. 8 oxen. 184 cows. 31 neat stock. 8 sheep. 5 hogs. 90 fowl. 21 autos.

Margery Eastman: For a short time, Irving Stiles worked and lived on my grandparents' (Sumner and Margery Layne) dairy farm. His young son also lived there. Grandma, before tossing the laundry into the ringer washer, was checking pockets. In the little boy's sweatshirt pocket, she found a frog.

Jim Wilfong in his Life Story of David Crouse: Over the years we climbed all the Baldface Range of Mountains and more. We were learning things. We mapped trails, had lessons on compass reading, learned how to triangulate. We learned about minerals and gemstones. We picked blueberries and mountain cranberries in peanut butter pails for our mothers. We learned about glaciers, and about the early settlers and which houses they built.

"Hillside Farms" continued from page 1

Flax was the first crop. The seeds were used for oil in lamps and paint, while the plant fibers were used to make linen cloth for warm weather clothing. Squash, corn, and beans were planted, as well as potatoes, turnips, and carrots. These plants would keep through the winter in the cellar. Care was taken to be sure there was still something to eat in March, at the end of the long winter. Apples were another staple, either dried or made into cider or vinegar.

Unidentified unmarked gravestones beside the stone for Heny McKeen (1780-1865) in the Eastman Charles Cemetery

It was a hard life. The growing season was short and the winters were long. Often children were not named until they were 3 or 4 years old. Many gravestones with no names mark children.

As the families had time, they moved rocks to create plow-able land and to make walls to keep animals in a pasture or out of a crop field. Large rocks could be split by drilling a line of holes, letting them fill with rainwater, and over winters the ice would break the rock apart. A slow process.

Ella (Marston) Andrews (1854-1915) feeding sheep

Cooking was done on a hearth, which did not heat the house well and used a lot of wood. Roofs of ash shakes and chimneys made of sticks and mud often led to house fires.

In 1815 Mount Tambora in Indonesia erupted sending ash into the atmosphere which lowered the temperatures in New England by nearly ten degrees. The year 1816 was known as the year with no summer. It snowed or had freezing temperatures every month of the summer. Crops failed and starvation was real.

The one crop that kept people alive was sheep. The Merino sheep were established on the Iberian Peninsula, with exports illegal and punishable by death. In 1807, during the Napoleonic Wars, William Jarvis, consular to Portugal, persuaded the leader of Portugal to let him take some of the special Merino sheep across the ocean to America to save them from Napolean. On the long sail, the sheep were eaten. Jarvis went back and asked for more. Once he got them to America, he sold them to whomever he could. By 1810, sheep fever was booming. The Merino had a large quantity of high quality wool, and a cleft pallet which allowed them to eat woody browse.

During the War of 1812, when America was boycotting British wool, the people had their own wool. These sheep could find plenty to eat on these hillsides when no crops grew in 1816. And they could be eaten when there was nothing else for the family to eat. During the Civil War, the wool was used for soldiers' uniforms since there was a boycott on southern cotton. Rams and farms were each selling for $1500. Towns were being named for the sheep: Whethersfield. (A whether is a castrated ram) In 1840 there were more sheep than people in this area.

Another important early crop was maple syrup. Early on, a gash was made in the tree, and the sap dripped into wooded buckets. Later a spile was made by driving a spike through the soft pith of elderberry, mountain ash, or sumac. The sap was collected using a shoulder yoke or by oxen pulling a sled. It was boiled in a hollowed out log, using rocks that were heated in the fire to maintain the boil. By 1840, the abolition movement was strong, and families didn't want molasses or sugar cane which was "washed with the blood of slaves." So "pure" maple syrup was a political statement, and it was usually cooked down to make sugar "loaves," which were easier to store.

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Metal was expensive, but when a family could afford a metal pot, life became a little easier. Maple sap was boiled in pots (later large flat pans) and a kitchen stove made cooking and heating easier. Barbed wire fencing (invented in 1874) kept animals better.

Then came railroads to Fryeburg and to Gilead, but never up the Cold River Valley. Trees were cut in winter and floated down the Cold River to mills in the high water of spring. But on the west side of Baldface Mountain, a logging train went up the Wild River Valley, hauling out logs at such a rate that soon the area was treeless, just dry slash. In 1903 a fire, feeding on the slash, burned the Wild River Valley and up the west side of Baldface. One cord of wood was needed for a steam train to travel ten miles. A train stopped often to refuel.

It was in Germany and Nova Scotia in the mid-1800s that the process of making paper made from trees was discovered. (Before that paper was made of old rags. A news paper would have been posted at a public location for all to read the one copy.) The paper making process polluted the rivers with chlorine and sulfuric acid. And with denuded hillsides, the rivers were full of silt. This was a problem for the large mills downstream, where many young women were moving to find "easier," paid employment. The mill owners of southern New Hampshire petitioned that something be done! Senator John W. Weeks of Massachusetts introduced the Weeks Act in 1911, which authorized the US government to buy land protecting the watershed, creating National Forests, including the White Mountain National Forest.

The trains were bringing tourists who stayed for the summer in the countryside. Some families expanded their houses to create rooms for the boarders. At the same time, other families were moving west where the land was not so hard to farm, or to towns and cities and finding other employment. The hillside farms were being abandoned, leaving cellar holes and stone walls as lasting evidence of families who worked so hard to subsist here.

An abandoned house, Butter Hill Road

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Chatham Census Data

Year	Population
1790	58
1800	183
1810	201
1820	298
1830	419
1840	523
1850	516
1860	489
1870	445
1880	421
1890	329
1900	267
1910	209
1920	229
1930	168
1940	184
1950	177
1960	150
1970	134
1980	189
1990	268
2000	260
2010	337
2020	341

Road to Yesteryear

by Cora (Howard) Emerson Thurston

I followed an old back road
With overhung bushes and vines,
For it led back to yesteryear
And echoed the hoofbeats of time.
I passed by an old stone wall,
A stump fence then came into sight.
I heard the stone drag, and the haul,
And the rocks being hauled with much might.
I saw an old house standing by,
Strong timbered yet aged and gray.
I heard a child's laughter inside
And a mother's voice singing, so gay.
I stood by a drooping barn door
Then looked at the long empty mows,
Heard a horse's soft whinny for oats,
The imperative lowing of cows.
I walked down the barnyard lane,
Through the sagging pasture gate.
There I heard a boy shouting “Co, Boss,
Hurry up, for milking is late!”
A dog was barking nearby
At a frog in the ice pond below
The sun was fast setting and red,
As I turned and decided to go.
Then I saw at the top of the knoll,
Glowing 'neath the setting sun,
Many headstones of varying size.
I stepped closer and read every one.
All were there in that weedy old plot,
Resting so peaceful – so calm.
Yet, I knew their spirits still lived,
Still worked, loved, and laughed on the farm.
As I turned, and left the old place,
I could hear the old folks calling their goodbyes,
With smiles on their faces, so dear,
I waved gently, with tears in my eyes...

Donations

Thank you for your generous support!

Estate of David Crouse: David's research collection of local history; **Barbara Martin:** portraits of her great-great-great grandparents, Nathaniel and Rebecca (Wiley) Whitaker; **Emily Fernald:** a portrait of an ox by Jennifer Zulker and a photo by Stephie Hastings; **Frank Eastman:** paintings by M. Alice Dorner, David Crouse, and Inez Eastman; **John Stryker:** carpentry work in the museum area; **Michelle Luongo:** photo of a rare Painted Bunting in Chatham; **Cheryl Collins & Burke Callen:** paintings to sell at our Craft Fair; **Ann Fargo, June Kelley, SVFA:** ice cream for the Social.

Raffle items: **Frank Lunn:** archery lessons; **Beverly Aiman:** quilted table runner; **Justin Fisher:** custom sign; **Jayne Britton:** a book by Casey Sherman, a Fryeburg Academy graduate; **Stow Corner Store:** gift card; **Diane Scott;** a painting.

Office and museum materials: **Margery Eastman, Gail Calomb, Beverly Aiman, Steve Eastman.**

Monetary donations: **Kim Infinger, Bill Perry, Eric King, Jo Radner, Janine Cook, Susan Millar, Brenda Hitchcock, Cynthia McAllister, Diane Scott, Infinger Insurance Co., Sue Crowley, June Kelley** (for the tent at ice cream social), **Patty McNerney,** Anonymous.

We so appreciate all donations! If we have left anyone out, please let us know so you can be properly thanked.

Photos from Recent Events

Left: Peter Benson demonstrating a neck yoke for carrying.

Right: Group at Cellar Hole on Butter Hill.

Upcoming Events

September 6, 1 PM: Town Picnic on our Schoolhouse lawn. Please bring a dish to share. Hot dogs, hamburgers, and soft drinks provided.

October 11, 1 PM: Stories of the People in the South Chatham Cemetery, at the cemetery. All those with family or friends buried in the cemetery are welcome to tell their stories. Rain date, Oct 12, 1 PM.

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 Main Road, Chatham, NH 03813

Name: _____

Address: _____

Winter Address: _____

Email: _____

☐ 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.