

BRIDGEWATER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2023

Issue No. Twenty Four



circa. 1911

Monthly meetings

held last Tuesday
of each month at 6:30 p.m.
Old Brick School House
12 North Bridgewater Road
Bridgewater, VT 05034
www.bridgewaterhistory.org

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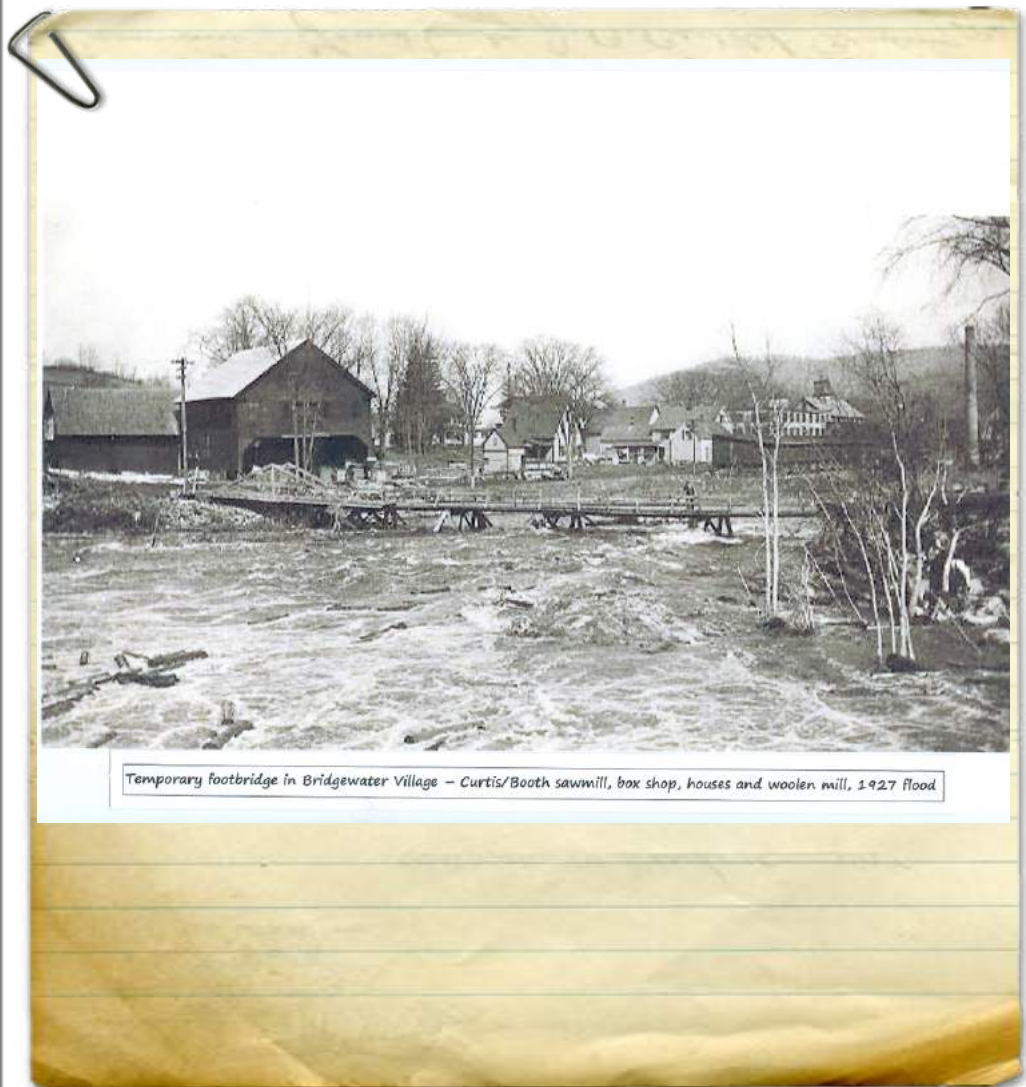
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*Asa Jones Memorial Stone on
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Temporary footbridge in Bridgewater Village - Curtis/Booth sawmill, box shop, houses and woolen mill, 1927 flood

From the President

By Polly Timken

Here at the Historical Society, we have wound up another successful season. Our volunteers did a great job creating and assembling this year's anniversary exhibit "The Message Gets Through". The telephone switchboards and photos of W.A. Perkins and the Southern Vermont Telephone Company were put on display, along with memorabilia and articles on Coolidge's inauguration 100 years ago. There were articles in the Valley News and the Vermont Standard, and publicity posted on Front Porch Forum and many local sites.

For the first time since COVID, we took the show on the road to the Bridgewater Celebration BBQ, where everyone enjoyed learning about the telephone switchboards. We also put the display up at the Grange for both **Howard Coffin's** talk on "**Coolidge, the Man I thought I Knew**" and **Cyndi Bittinger's** talk "**Grace Coolidge**". (See the photos below). Both talks were very well received. We are fortunate to have such terrific historians in our area.

The Board has decided to put more emphasis on our online presence by working with LMW Design to bring a fresh outlook and more information to our website. Many more people are doing their research online and there are many inquiries about genealogy and cemetery plots. We will also move into putting more of our stories and collection 'out there' for public access. BHS looks to actively engage more of the public with our history and collection. Chris Stevens has done a great job in building up our Facebook audience, providing new photos every Friday.

Another direction we would like to move in is the preservation of current history. The floods in Bridgewater this summer set historic records and many people have taken photos, recorded videos, and written stories. We hope to collect some of these memories and those in the future, both good and bad. Please contact us if you have photos or stories you would like to share.

Next April is the 50th anniversary of the Bridgewater Raft Race. We are assembling photos for a calendar to be sold during the holidays this year.

Please enjoy the newsletter and remember that we haven't come this far on our own. We have had your help every step of the way.



Cyndi Bittinger and Polly Timken



Jeannette Sawyer and Howard Coffin

Asa Jones First Settler of Bridgewater

By Polly Timken

Asa Jones was the first settler in Bridgewater. He was born in Sutton, Mass. in 1739. He married Dorcas Wade in 1762. They had six children. In 1779 he bought a “full right of land” in Bridgewater (site marked by a stone marker on the North Bridgewater Road), for 150 pounds from Bildad Easton, of Westminster Vermont.

He cleared a plot of land, built a three-sided log cabin, and moved his wife and family there in the Spring of 1780. His son Abner was eight at the time. Abner’s memoirs include a description of having a fire constantly burning at the largely open end of the cabin. They were able to make the trek to the site dragging hand sleds on snowshoes. Asa’s plan was to make maple sugar during March and April.

Asa and Dorcas’ daughter, Deborah, married Revolutionary War veteran Amos Mendell, who had arrived in Bridgewater in May of 1780, settling near the Jones property. It was Bridgewater’s first wedding. Their daughter Lucy, born in 1791, was the first child born in Bridgewater.

On July 10, 1781, Asa was chosen as the moderator of the first proprietors’ meeting, held in Woodstock and acted as the proprietors’ treasurer. Asa Jones, Amos Mendell, and James Cary were named to a committee to run out the lines of the town, lay out roads and attest to survey bills.

The second proprietors’ meeting in November of 1783, was held at Asa Jones house. In 1784 the proprietors honored Asa by giving him the liberty of pitching a one-hundred-acre lot as compensation for his hardships making a settlement and establishing Bridgewater. Asa died in 1786 at the age of 47 of “quick consumption”.

On September 15th, members of BHS met with Henry Jones IV, a fourth great grandson of Asa Jones. He showed us an oil on board portrait of Abner Jones, Asa’s son, that had been in his family for generations. We introduced him to Bob Kirby, who is the current owner of the Asa Jones property and house site. They discussed how Bob and Gordon Tuthill researched the origins of the town of Bridgewater and the part Asa Jones played in establishing the town. Bob Kirby has written, using research by both he and Gordon Tuthill, “Chronicling Bridgewater”. Bob then took Henry Jones up to see the stone that marks the Asa Jones house site.

Son Abner, in his memoirs, remembers some very influential events that caused him to turn to religion at a very young age. When he was 8 or 9 there was influx of “grey or black worms” that ate the corn and wheat crops devastating the harvest. The only way to keep them out of the fields was to dig ditches around them. The second event was the accidental shooting of Moses Sampson by Nathan Tinkham while hunting. Abner explains that these troubles, combined with the Native American raid on Barnard caused him to seek solace through prayer. He too would go to a large rock about 60-70 feet Southwest of their house and pray. (There is presently a large rock in the middle of the field where the Jones house stood).

After a tumultuous adolescence, with employment curtailed by illness and accidents, Abner moved on to Lyndon Vermont around 1797, and studied to be a doctor. There he married Damaris Prior. But, by 1801, he had entered the ministry. He continued in this field, moving several times throughout Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. His wife Damaris died in 1835, two years after their move to Assonet. He moved onto Portsmouth and Upton Massachusetts, marrying Nancy F. Clark of Nantucket in 1839. He died in Exeter NH in 1841. In the course of his life, he had written many hymns and, together with Elias Smith, published multiple hymnals for use in the “Christian Churches.”

Sources:

F. Gordon Tuthill and Robert P. Kirby “Chronicling the Early History of Bridgewater Vermont 1741-1791”.
 Gladys Adams “Bridgewater Vermont 1779-1976”.
 Wikipedia.org “Abner Jones”
 Abner Jones “Memoirs of The Life and Experience. Travels and Preaching of Abner Jones”



Henry Jones and Bob Kirby with portrait of Abner Jones

Taking Care of Bridgewater Cemeteries

By Chris Stevens:

Board members Sondra Stevens and Chris Stevens spent Saturday June 3rd repairing grave stone bases and general cleanup of the old section of the Mount Pleasant cemetery located on Goldcoast road. Assisting with the cleanup was Bridgewater Cemetery Commissioners, Owen Astbury, Greg Jenne and Butch Wardwell, as well as family/friends and Tom Giffin and his volunteers from VOCA (Vermont Old Cemetery Association). The weather of course was typical for this summer with rain. The rain unfortunately did not allow the group to repair actual broken stones as the glue(s) would not set up properly with the wet conditions. This did not hamper the amount of work that was achieved with the energetic group. Brush was cut back along the perimeter of the cemetery along the stone wall, general cleanup of the area, many stone bases were repaired and grave stones that had fallen or broken over were mortared back into bases after excavating by shovel.



Mount Pleasant Cemetery

It was very impressive how Tom and the VOCA volunteers broke our volunteers into groups alongside the VOCA volunteers and worked their way thru the old section making repairs. I enjoyed the entire group working together and noted it was very satisfying at the end of the day (yet tiring) to have helped with this type of community event. The rain did not slow down the group's progress despite the miserable condition.

VOCA was founded in October 1958 by UVM professor Leon Dean to "encourage the restoration and preservation of neglected and abandoned cemeteries in the state of Vermont," both public and private. VOCA members regularly join local volunteers in towns around the state, and perform gravestone repair, righting and cleaning in Vermont's 2000 plus cemeteries. The members come from all over the state and volunteer time during Spring/Summer. As VOCA notes the rewards of preserving and restoring old Vermont cemeteries are many: personal, educational, patriotic and historical. Here is a web link for anyone interested: www.voca58.org.

It should be noted the VOCA also assisted in repairs in the summer of 2022 at the Kellogg cemetery as well.



Butch Wardwell, Owen Astbury and Tom Giffin



Diaries of J. Edward Curtiss

By Polly Timken - Curator

This summer we were given a collection of diaries written by Edward Curtiss. The diaries were collected in 2015 by Lloyd Oldenburg, when he bought the Curtiss house in Curtis Hollow. They span the years 1874-1927. We are very fortunate to have Elisha Lee studying them and doing research on Curtiss' life.

One item of note, which hasn't been resolved, is why he spelled his name with two ss's when the rest of the family used one. He worked at several jobs and lived in different neighborhoods, which adds to the interest of the diaries. Elisha Lee has discovered references to farming and what Curtiss grew. Reading a series of diaries and researching the genealogy provides a valuable picture of life in Bridgewater and the surrounding areas during that time. Please enjoy Elisha's summary of what he has found so far.

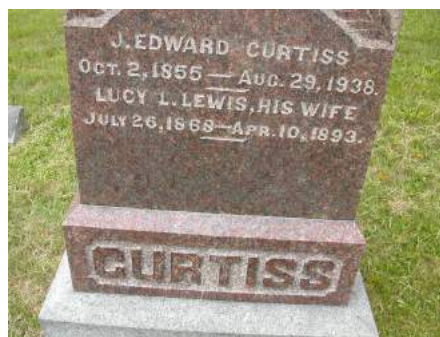


Curtiss Diaries

By Elisha Lee

As an amateur historian, I have always been drawn to the obscure. The better-known figures of our past have been thoroughly studied, often for generations, and there is little chance of discovering anything really new or different. The ordinary men and women of the past, on the other hand, have much to tell us if only because no one has bothered to look for it. I was therefore excited by the prospect of looking through a series of diaries kept by a Woodstock farmer, J. Edward Curtiss (1855-1938) in the 19th and 20th Centuries. There are a total of 18 diaries in all, beginning in 1877 when Curtiss was a 22-year-old living on his family's third generation farm on Curtis Hollow Road. The diaries run intermittently through 1924, carrying Curtiss through two marriages, work ranging from his father's farm to night watchman, prison guard and finally caretaker at the Meccawe Club.

Eddie's grandfather, Francis Curtis, formerly of Monson, Massachusetts, settled on what is now Curtis Hollow Road in 1799, buying the land that would later be farmed by his sons and grandsons. While nominally residents of Woodstock, the Curtis family were geographically much closer to Bridgewater. Both of Eddie Curtiss' wives were members of the Lamb family of Bridgewater Hill. The diaries provide a window into the social and economic life of the town and its people over a period of almost half a century. In our next edition I will share what they have to tell us of one man's life on and off a 19th Century hill farm, and of Eddie Curtiss himself.



Mount Pleasant Cemetery

Cole 8 Automobile

*"There's a Touch of Tomorrow
in all that Cole Does Today"*

By Bob Kancir

Company Slogan

On August 2nd, 1923, Nellie Perkins, telephone switchboard operator at Southern Vermont Telephone in Bridgewater, received a call with an important message for Vice President Calvin Coolidge; President Harding had died. As there was no telephone at the Coolidge homestead in Plymouth, W.A. Perkins, Nellie's husband, drove his 1918 Cole-8 to Plymouth to deliver the message.

What was a Cole-8 automobile?

The Cole Motor Car Company was an early automobile maker based in Indianapolis, Indiana. Cole automobiles were built from 1908 until 1925. They were quality-built luxury cars. The make is a pioneer of the V-8 engine.

In 1904, Joseph J. Cole (1869–1925) bought the Gates-Osborne Carriage Company and soon renamed it the Cole Carriage Company. There, he built his first automobile. It was a high-wheeled motor buggy with a two-cylinder engine.

In June 1909, Cole Carriage Company was reorganized as the Cole Motor Car Company and developed a conventional small car, the Cole Model 30. Between 1909 and 1914 the Cole Motor Company came out with a series of cars of various sizes and engines. The series 40 with a four-cylinder engine and 116-inch wheelbase. The series 50 on a 122-inch wheelbase and a series 60 with six-cylinder engine on 132-inch wheelbase.

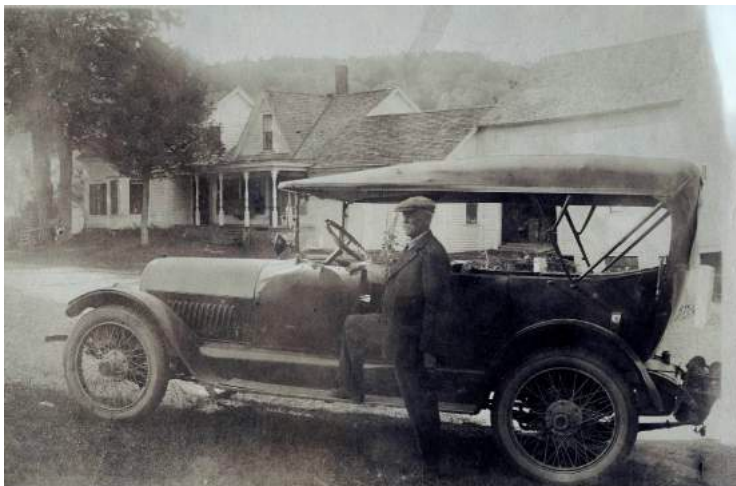
Big news came in mid-1915: Only one year after Cadillac had pioneered the V-8 engine, Cole brought out its own V-8 powered automobile. He would stay with it until the very end of the make, dropping its Fours and Sixes after 1916. It was built by then a division of General Motor that also manufactured the V-8 for Cadillac. The car was named the Model 8-50. It had a 127-inch (3,200 mm) wheelbase. Five body styles were available at prices between \$1,785 and \$3,250.

There were few changes for 1917. The car was now called the Model 860. There were five body styles at about the same price level. Some of them received quite flamboyant designations such as "Tuxedo Roadster", "Tourcoupe", and "Toursedan". 4193 Cole automobiles were manufactured in that year.

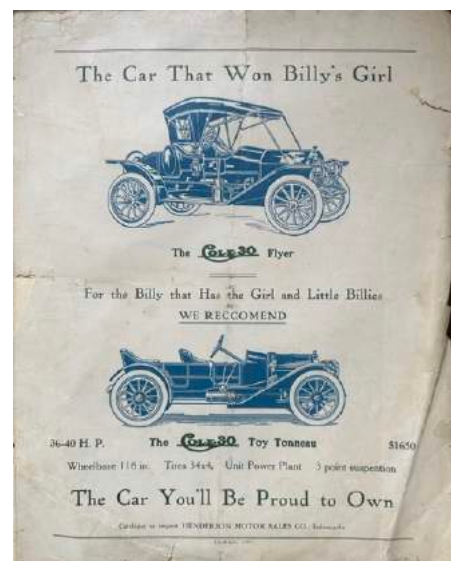
The new kind of marketing became even more apparent in 1918. Advertising slogans were "There's a Touch of Tomorrow In All Cole Does Today" or "Did You Ever Go Ballooning in a Cole?", the latter referring to the adoption of balloon tires as an option that year. The car was advertised as the "Aero-Eight" (internally Model 870). There were three body styles, a roadster, a "Sportster" and a touring car. They cost \$2,395 each and seated 2, 4, and 7 passengers, respectively. The cars also became more fashionably styled.

Cole opened new, wider production facilities in 1922. However, sales went down rapidly, mainly because of a short but severe recession. In this situation and without any debts yet, J. J. Cole decided to liquidate his company rather than risking his fortune by going on. Joseph Cole began liquidating his firm early in 1925. He died suddenly of an infection on August 8, 1925, shortly before liquidation was finished.

Source: Wikipedia



W.A. Perkins and his Cole 8



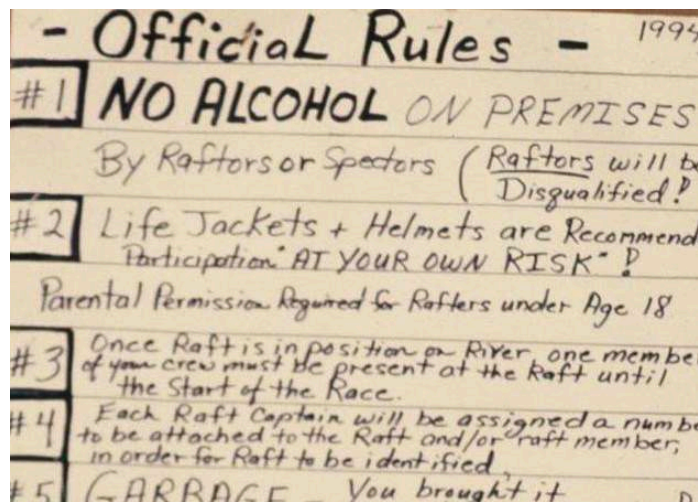
Sheet Music for Cole Flyer

50th Anniversary of the Bridgewater Raft Race

The annual Bridgewater Raft Race celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2024. In 1974 two locals, “Hippy” Jim Cloniger and William “Bear” Massey were inspired by Mojave folklore. They took to the waters of “the phantom duck of the river” in homemade rafts. The tradition of homemade rafts, some of dubious seaworthiness but with a lot of creative flair, which sends enthusiastic rafters down a three mile stretch of the Ottauquechee River from the bridge near the Long Trail Brewery to the Bridgewater Mill.



1986 Mike Gunn, Chris Stevens with the funny hair swish, Dan (Stub) Fernandes and Phil Colteryahn



Bridgewater Raft Race Official Rules 1994

The race is less about the competition than reveling in the journey and much to the delight of the spectators cheering them on all along the river. In celebration of this milestone, the 2024 Bridgewater Historical Society’s calendar will feature historical photos from past races. Look for the announcement when the calendars will be available.

Bridgewater Historical Society Annual Meeting

The 2023 Annual Meeting will be held at the Old Brick Schoolhouse on Monday October 30th at 6:30. We will be voting on the slate of officers to fill the positions of those who’s terms are up:

Secretary: Polly Timken

Treasurer: Julie Stevens

Membership: Sue Kancir

Board Member (2nd Term) Chris Stevens



Although we don’t have a speaker this year, we would like to have participation by as many members as can make it. It is a good time to come see the exhibit “The Message Gets Through”.



Bridgewater Corners Rt 4 going towards Killington 1927 Flood

