

BRIDGEWATER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April 2024

Issue No. Twenty Five



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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Letter on notepaper from
the H.G. Vaughn Store



Walter and Wilbur Wilson
Wilbur was Beulah Wilson Putnam's father.
The case to the right is possibly the case now at BHS.
Photo and case gifted from Audrey Putnam.

From the President

By Polly Timken

We can count ourselves lucky if we grew up in a town where there was a local store. Selling groceries and dry goods was only part of the equation that makes up the heart and soul of a town.

Children were taught arithmetic under the guise of buying penny candy. Saving up the coins to use and budgeting the hard-earned amount was all part of the process. Making those important decisions on what to spend it on started early and no one forgets their mistakes along the way.

The store owners deserve accolades for taking the time to teach the next generation not only the math involved, but possibly coping with the minor offenses of shoplifting. Being one of the early adults outside of the family that a child confronted made a huge impression on them and many times minor offenses were turned into learning experiences instead of brushes with the law.

Many are the kids who improved their reading skills, by reading the comics and magazines. (Also, many are the store owners who looked aside when the comic was put back as opposed to being bought.)

The local store is a meeting place for neighbors. Many times it's the store owner or clerk that notices when someone doesn't show up for their coffee or gas. Sometimes they are the 'first responders' who alert the town when help is needed. Issues now quickly exploding on Facebook were discussed and re-discussed until the audience, or voters, had a better understanding of the pros and cons of a topic. Civility was a product of face-to-face communication.

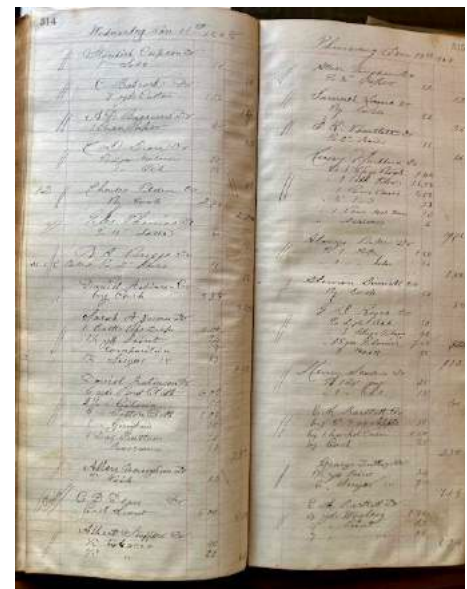
Speaking of communication, we have included an article about pay phones, a vital part of why people stopped in at the local store. That jingle of coins dropping has not been totally forgotten.

Maybe they were mostly from away, but it was a draw as people invariably bought something else while there. Our phone was given to us by Lisa Olmstead and it came from her family's store. John Nyblom restored it and it is now hanging in the Historical Society.

Due to a lack of volume and the ever-present transportation costs, there is no way to compete with supermarkets on a commercial level. It has been up to a few benevolent people to figure out ways to keep local stores in business, thereby saving the heart of a town. In this issue we have tried to record what we know about the many stores that have existed over the years in Bridgewater. We welcome any information our readers may have on the topic.



West Bridgewater Store 1915



Pages from the Babcock Store Ledger dated Nov. 11, 1868

Bridgewater Stores

Bridgewater Corners Store

By 1872 Charles Babcock was the sole owner of the store in Bridgewater Corners and in 1879 he became Bridgewater Corner's first postmaster when a post office was established here May 26 1879. Charles Babcock (1808-1901) was born in Bridgewater, son of Samuel and Eunice (Gurley) Babcock.

Volney Babcock, nephew of Charles, became a partner in the store and on May 11 1880 succeeded his uncle as postmaster. The Standard of Sept 19 1889 reported: "The store of C. & V.C. Babcock at the Corners was entered early Wednesday AM, the safe blown open, money and books taken and fire set to the building. By 5:30 AM there was not a beam or a sill left." Charles Babcock was Town Treasurer and \$150.00 of the \$400.00 taken belonged to the town.

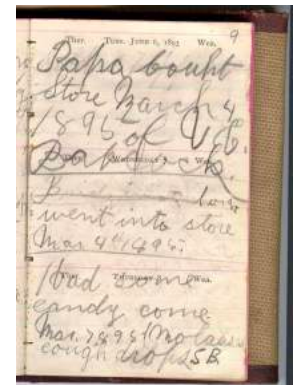
By Oct 10 1889 A. D. Barrows was sawing lumber for Babcock's new store and on Jan 16 1890 the Babcocks were back in business in the new building.

Volney Babcock sold the place to H. G. Vaughan in 1896 and it was Vaughan's store until 1945 - H. G. Vaughan until 1906 and then A. A. Vaughan.



H.G. Vaughan Store

Diary of Alfred Allen Vaughan (b. 1882) son of Horace and Candace Vaughan, of Bridgewater. His grandfather Alfred Sargent lived with them and is referred as grandpapa.



Crockwell, Inc General Store

Royal Fraser had it until 1959 when it became Crockwell, Inc. Five years later it was the "Corner's Store", proprietors P. Ellis and M. O'Neil.

For a few years the Corners was without a store and in 1972 Mr. & Mrs. Everett Fay opened it as the "Country Store". In 1976, it operated as the "Junction Store."

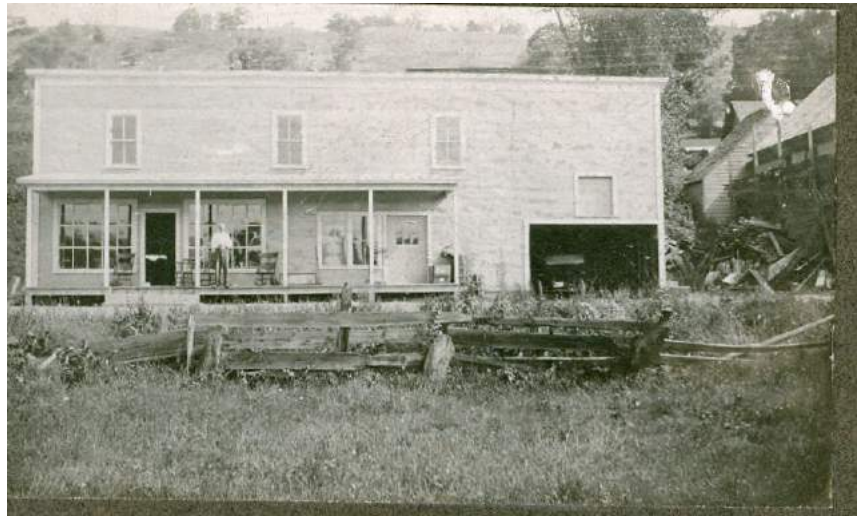
The Bridgewater Corners Country Store located on the corner of Rt 4 and 100A is still in operation by the current owner, Farogh Wien.

Bridgewater Stores

Cont.

Wesley Barrows/Owen Cobb Store

In April 1909 Wesley Barrows opened a general store at the Corners and Pearl Biathrow clerked here for about a year. In Nov 1910 Owen Cobb bought W. A. Barrows general merchandise and feed store. In 1915 Cobb had the Swan house taken down and put up a new building which he conducted as a store until his death in 1937. He is remembered by some for the much used spittoon that stood near a post on the floor of his store. Elwin Rogers kept the store for a time after Owen Cobb.



Cobb Garage & Store

The store was located in the Corners on Rt. 4 across the road from the Country Store.

New England Protective Union Store

From 1854 to 1861 Bridgewater had a New England Protective Union Store, Company Div. 359, with William T. Pierce, Merchant, in charge. William T. Pierce of Hartland, brother of Lewis C. Pierce, married Sysan Bryant in 1843.

The diphtheria epidemic of 1861 took three members of the Pierce family: In June, Susan age 15 and Ellen age 16, and on Oct 24 William T. Pierce age 46.

The Union Store was dissolved by notice signed by George Raymond, President of said store on Nov 5 1861.

We do not know where this store was located.

What Was a Protective Union Store?

The New England Protective Union, established in 1849, was a cooperative movement which provided city markets for rural produce; butter, eggs, apples and potatoes in exchange for goods; hardware, clothing, and household goods to stock in Division stores.

In the mid-1840s, Protective Unions began to be organized in Vermont. Using ideas imported to America from European social movements and collectivist social theories, the Protective Unions started by providing insurance benefits and pension plans, and then expanded their operations to include cooperative purchasing of food and supplies. By 1850, the high-point of the Protective Union movement, there were 181 divisions throughout New England and the Great Lakes area. Vermont had about forty units, more divisions than any other state. Many of those were organized by Wooster Sprague of Montpelier. By 1867, when the Protective Union movement broke up, there had been 152 unions or union stores in 129 Vermont towns. Some had lasted only a few years; a few had lasted more than a decade.

Bridgewater Stores

Cont.

Brown/Robinson Store

A. D. Slack kept a store from 1863 till 1867 when he sold out and moved to Sherburne. Jonathan N. Sawyer of Sharon and Otis Walker of Sherburne came in Feb 1867 and after the untimely death of Otis Walker in May the same year, the business became Sawyer & Carpenter.

J. N. Sawyer was in business from 1869 to Dec 1874 when he rented to Francis E. Derby who kept a cash or ready pay store. Francis Derby was born Orford NH 1836 son of John and Fidelity (Freeman) Derby and his widowed mother married Peter Shattuck. In 1885 Frank Derby was succeeded by his brother Augustus Derby who kept store until his death in 1897.



Will G. Brown owner of the Bridgewater Village store 1897-1907 - was later Robinson's store-note the gas lamp

W.G. Brown Store

Will G. Brown had the business until April 1907 when William Henry Emery of Pomfret bought him out.

Julian Lloyd Robinson (1880-1968) son of Scott and Ella (Howes) Robinson was the next owner and he kept a good general store which later became J. L. Robinson & Son.

Gordon Robinson, son of Julian, closed the store permanently on Dec 8 1973.



The J.L. Robinson General Store in Bridgewater Village - Gordon Green worked here and delivered groceries in a Model T Ford similar to this car in the 1930s. Photograph donated by Ruth Needham.

The Brown/Robinson store was located on the north side of Rt. 4 second houses west of North Bridgewater Road. Now a private home and still has the large front porch.

Bridgewater Stores from:

Bridgewater Vermont 1779-1976 by Gladys S. Adams

Bridgewater Stores

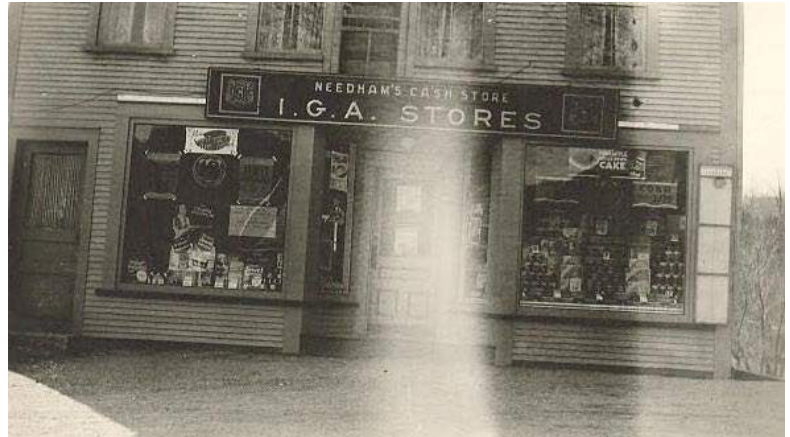
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I. G. A. Store

William Benjamin Needham, always called Ben, was born in Orwell, Vt. Jan 13 1895. During WWI service he met Royal Weeden and through his friendship with the Weeden family he came to Bridgewater after the war and married Royal's sister Gladys.

Ben Needham became postmaster at Bridgewater Village in 1922 under President Harding, continued under Presidents Coolidge and Hoover but lost out when the country elected Franklin D. Roosevelt.

He then opened an I.G.A. store which was located where the Bridgewater Tavern is now. He was later employed by Bridgewater Woolen Company where he worked as a weaver until his retirement in 1966.



As you can see by the photos many businesses occupied the same building over the years. This building is located on the south side of Rt. 4 and the end of North Bridgewater Road.



Bridgewater Village Post Office



Thompson's Restaurant

Upcoming Events

Sunday June 9th at 2pm at the Bridgewater Grange

Howard Coffin

"Ancient Standing Stones and Chambers in Vermont? Once upon a time with Barry Fell"

Sunday August 25th at 2pm at the Bridgewater Grange

Cindy Bittinger

"Vermont Women, Native Americans & African Americans"

Sunday September 22nd at 2pm at the Bridgewater Grange

John Atwood

Vermont Organs



Bridgewater Cairn

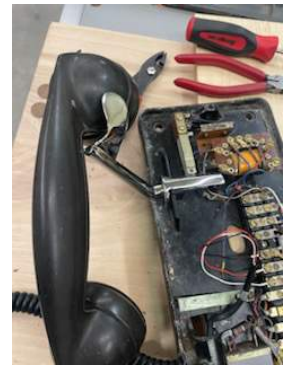
Curator's Corner

By Polly Timken



One of the items in our collection is a pay phone that Lisa Hutt Olmstead gave to us. It came out of the Olmstead store. Pay phones were certainly another mainstay of the local market and a savior for many people passing through as well.

We asked John Nyblom to restore it and he was able to repair it enough to accept quarters. In addition to replacing the switch hook that was missing, he installed a new cord and replace the coin vault lock. It has been cleaned on the inside and works well now. Judging from the coins he found in it, he thinks it was in use from the '50's-70's. He got help from Mark at the Old Phone Shop in Franklin WI.



Read more about the Davis/Olmstead Store on the BHS website.

<https://www.bridgewaterhistory.org/stories/>

The first coin operated phone was invented by William Gray in 1891. His wife was ill and he had trouble making a call at a factory down the street as he wasn't a subscriber to the local telephone company. He went on to invent the phone and take on a partner, George Long. The Gray Telephone Pay Station Company made improvements and had 20 patents. Early on you made the call and the operator told you how much you owed as she listened to the different tones as the coins were dropped in. In 1909 a mechanism was developed to return the coins if the call didn't go through. Within 2 years there were 25,000 in NYC alone. Fast forward to the era of cell phones and as of 2022, there are no public pay phones in NYC.

Source: Wikipedia

70 Years Ago the Bridgewater Fire Department Celebrated the Opening of it's Original Building

The Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department Inc., was set up in papers filed by Harlan H. Booth, Colburn G. Greenough and Stillman L. Needham. It is a non-profit Corporation.
Rutland Daily Herald June 24th 1953

The Vermont Standard **January 21st, 1954** reported the invitation of the grand opening of the fire station.

People of Bridgewater, Woodstock and surrounding towns are cordially invited to an open house at Bridgewater on Jan. 29 to celebrate completion of the fire house there. The affair will open at 7:30 p.m. There will be refreshments and dancing plus plenty of opportunity for visitors to inspect the new fire house.

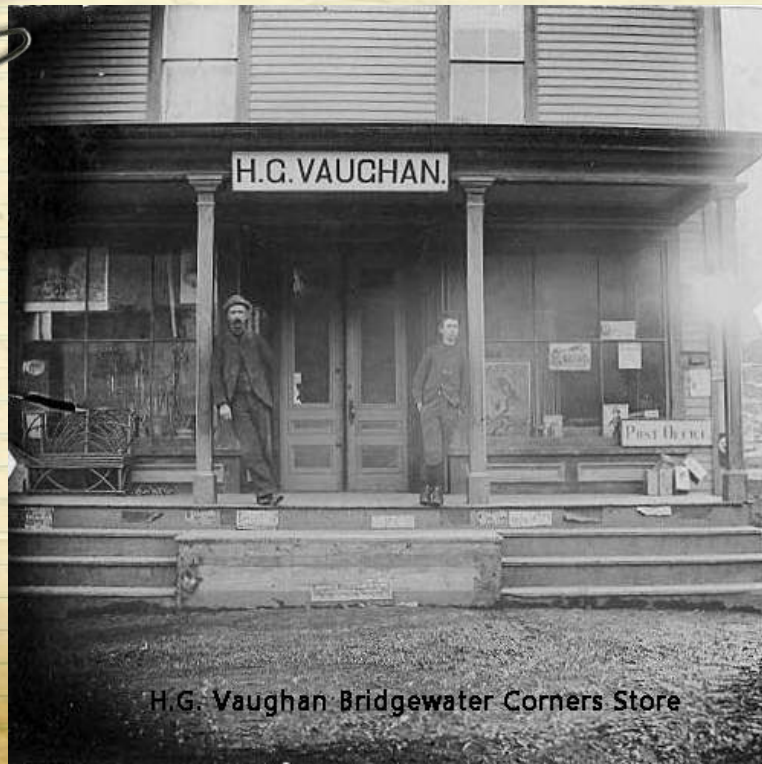
The cinder block building was started last June. Most of the work has been done by members of the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire department. The 30 x 36 structure with basement will house the fire truck and other vehicles and equipment. All funds for materials were earned by the department with various events of contributed by individuals. No public funds have gone into construction of the house.



Bridgewater Fire Department Baseball team with their first engine in the Mill yard. The engine was built by the members using an old town truck.

Check out Walter Houghton's recollections of the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department on the BHS website:

<https://www.bridgewaterhistory.org/stories/>



H.G. Vaughan Bridgewater Corners Store

The Bridgewater Historical Society

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