

THE HARTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

FALL 2009

THE STORE IN NORTH HARTLAND

When we drive through North Hartland it is hard to not be impressed by the beautiful old store building on the West side of the common, but did you know that it was built as a showroom for carriages and not as a general store at all?

In 1875 and in 1883 Betsy Marble and Edmund McCabe sold land to Henry R. Miller, and in the late 1880's Henry Miller constructed a building where he established a showroom for the sale of a variety of carriages. The showroom and workshops were on the ground floor and the upstairs held a dance hall. (I think it interesting that he would consider a dance hall so important to the well being of the town that he would make this a part of his construction

project. I understand that it is a fine place to dance – complete with a bouncing floor. CYM) At first Miller sold many types of carriages but later became the exclusive agent of the Excelsior Carriage Co. This Company insisted that Miller move his business to White River Jct which was a fast growing trading center and railroad hub. In 1895, he made this move, ending a very short period of doing business in North Hartland. In 1904, Henry's 18 year old son signed an order for a carload of Jaxson steam cars, and, like it or not, Henry was in the car business. None too happy at first, Henry was a great salesman and thus we still have Miller Auto in White River.

Henry Miller sold the building to the No. Hartland Building Association, and in the early 1900's the space was rented from the Association by Hayes and Byrd Miles as a grocery store. Ester Miles worked for her father and it was her job to deliver groceries, but being afraid of horses, she had to deliver them on foot unless she could get her brother to drive her. When the Miles moved to California, Ester and her husband, Paul Morrison rented the store area. They separated and Paul Morrison moved to Hartland and opened a store in the Sturtevant building. The North Hartland store was closed for a few years but was reopened by Esther. A big undertaking for a single mom. The building was a busy place. Besides the store there were 5 tenements, a poolroom which later held church services. The library was also there at one time. The dance hall was the setting for many parties, shows and the showing of movies. It was even used as a place for archery practice. The town rented the space for the school at one time. Esther married Laurence Young in 1938 and they ran the store together. This was the typical country general store where men hung around and played cards, and I'm sure had a lot of good advice for the politicians of the time.

P.N. and Louise Courtemanche bought the building in the spring of 1946, starting a new venture in their lives. They had farmed in Hartford and moved with 7 of their 11 children to run a country store. Patrons were able to keep a running tab of purchases and then pay up on payday. At this time, country dances were held weekly and all the local children were allowed to attend and their parents helped them learn to dance. The family loved living in the closeness of a community but P.N. grew weary of working indoors so they sold and moved to Hartland where they ran "Breezy Hill" cabins and Mr. Courtemanche went to work as a carpenter.

In 1951, the store was purchased by Robert and Edna Coutermarsh and Mark and Shirley Coutermarsh. It stayed in Coutermarsh hands until Mark sold it in the early 2000's. During this time, the

post office was relocated to this building, the fire department moved a truck into a garage that was behind the store building and a fire siren was mounted on top of the building with the box located just outside the front entrance. The fire department remained there until 1986.

In recent years this wonderful old building has had a face lift. It is no longer a general store but still a community gathering place with the enlarged Post Office and the pottery store.

Many thanks to The Hartford Historical Society May-June 2005 newsletter, Velma Morrison Wright , Bonnie Downs (formerly Coutermarsh), and Marilyn Courtermanche Gates.

As so often happens, the more I learn the more I realize how much I don't know. North Hartland was a thriving community long before 1895 but where did the people shop? I have an advertizing card of a W.D. Spalding, North Hartland on which he advertizes a great range of items for sale, including groceries. In reading newsclips I think he ran this from about 1870 to 1900 but cannot find mention in The 1884 Windsor County Gazetteer, nor can I find him or any other store on a 1869 map. It seems a bit far to always go to the Three Corners or White River Junction for their needs, especially before the trains came through. That may be the answer before 1870, but why can't I find any more evidence of Mr. Spalding , Dealer in Dry Goods, Clothing, Hats, Caps and much more ?? C.Y.M.

FUN AND REVENUE IN SKUNKS FOR HARTLAND BOY TRAPPERS

Nov 30, 1920

(This may be more than you want to know. C.Y.M.)

"The boys are trapping these days. Hartland has a live group of youngsters who wake with their alarm clocks, crawl out of bed at an early hour, put on their "skunkin'clo-es", take a club and a flashlight and set out in the dim and frosty morning before daylight to visit their traps.

Cicil Durphy is, by virtue of his knowledge and experience, a sort of leader and director of the enterprise, and his partner on his route is Urban Jackson, Glenn Bates and Leo Howe and Glenn Bates, Roger Flanagan and Phillip Royce "go it alone" in different directions. Billy Crane and his younger brother Aubrey find it pretty hard to tramp, and they get pretty sleepy but they never give up. Robert and Carroll Durphy go together, and Carroll is very observant of the interesting things of nature and often brings home a pretty leaf or a feather. Eldon Barbour is another big boy who is very energetic and has a great many skins to his credit. Lee Hood and Robert Stillson are also in the gang.

Prince, the "houn' dawg" always goes along to help, but he has learned to keep a safe distance away while this black and white kitty is still alive. Then he runs ahead to bring the news of the catch.

The boys are trapping for skunk and muskrat principally, though they hope to get a mink. The traps number anywhere from five to forty and are set in likely places on the hillside pastures, along the brooks,, or on the borders of the woodlands.

In some places they construct a "cubby" for the skunk trap. This consists of three or four stones laid on three sides of a square with a flat stone over the top and the bait is placed inside. The trap is set just outside the entrance, imbedded in the earth so as to bring the "pan" on a level with the ground.

The bait which proves the most enticing to Mr. Mephitis is a choice bit of carrion or an aged egg, and before setting the traps the boys go to the butcher and get whatever unsalable prizes they can secure.

There are several grades of skunk pelts called by the boys "full -stripe", "half- stripe", "quarter-stripe" and "star", those having the least white, or only the white star on the back of the head, being the most valuable.

The muskrats are caught near the brooks and ponds, or in a swamp, and sometimes the boys find the trap has been dragged in the water, but that does not injure the fur.

Day after day the boys make their rounds, for the game laws require that the traps be visited at least once in 24 hours and so they tramp for 2 hours and come in hungry to breakfast, usually with nothing to show for their patience. Sometimes they bring in a claw or a toe, showing that some poor creature was lucky enough to get away with his life.

But sometimes sonny comes home grinning and calls the family to the door to look at his prize, a short, thick muskrat with a flat, hairless tail, or else a malodorous animal with a handsome black coat and 2 more or less pronounced white stripes along his back. Sonny doesn't want any breakfast now, he is too excited. Furthermore, his animal must be skinned at once.

"Gee, don't it make a feller feel fine when he gets a skunk!" he says as he hurries to the barn.

Mother smiles and says" It depends on your point of view"

"Skin your own skunks "is an old saying, but it is about the most adequate one we know to express minding your own business. Certainly no one cares to interfere.

But Sonny knows how to do the work, and he begins by cutting around the animals ankles and slitting the inner sides of the hind legs. Then he pulls off the skin turning it wrong side out over the head.

His stretcher board is carefully whittled, widest in the center and narrow at one end. Then he puts the skin over the board, fur side in, stretching it more lengthwise than sidewise, and inserts a wedge of wood under the back to raise and stretch it still tighter.

Where to put the pelts while they are drying is a question, for rats will eat them if they can get at them, so sonny hangs them in the ice house.

When Sonny brings in the "skunk suet", Mother has to try out the fat by putting it into a pan in the oven. Then she pours it into little Vaseline jars, and it rivals the perfumes of Araby. It is a fine ointment for lameness or a "cold on the lungs."

Fur-bearing animals seem to be rather scarce this season, perhaps not because they are fewer, but because there are more boys to every animal. But when the time comes to sell the furs the boys will get a good price for them and will have enough to pay them for the long hours for waiting and watching.

And even when they do not bring in anything they come home whistling, for they enjoy the walks in the fresh air.

““Mother” says Carroll, “you ought to get up and see the sunrise. It’s awful pretty.”

By Miss Florence Sturtevant

OCTOBER

Full now upon the yellow fields,
The mellow haze of autumn rests,
The harvest now it’s fullness yields,
And all the needs of man are blest.

“Tis wonderful! October’s sun,
Makes paradise of noon,
And night, with all her stars as one,
Plays homage to the moon.

October is the artist gay,
Who turns the summers green to gold
With skillful touches free and bold
What pictures paints he ,day by day.

By Byron Ruggles

Carol Mowry, Editor