

# HARTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2012

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## SUMNERS FALLS

The town of Hartland is now the proud owner of the area known as Sumner's Falls. I would encourage you to go visit this section of town along the Connecticut River. There is an interesting history connected to the area. Knowledge of this history should make your visit more satisfying. The first accounting comes from Wilbur Sturtevant – long time Town Clerk, storeowner, and recorder of the town's best stories. C.Y.M.

“Lumbering on the Connecticut River was carried on very extensively in the early days of the town. Just at the upper end of Sumner's Falls, a dam twelve feet high stretched across the river, and a saw mill stood near it on the Vermont side.

“The big logs of first growth pine, four or five feet in diameter were floated down from points north and guided by a boom to the west side of the river and held there above the mill until wanted. Two men would go up the river in a boat and bring a log from the enclosure down to the mill where it was raised by means of a pulley on a big wheel run by power, to the saw mill, where it was sawed by gang- saws all in one operation. Then the men would go back and get another log. The manner of getting the log was simple. One man held the oars and managed the boat. The other, in the stern, threw a rope which had an iron hook in the end of it, with an iron “dog” attached to it so that the “dog”, which was a piece of iron bent like a hook, could be driven down into the log with an axe. When the log was secured, it was guided under the boom by the man in the stern, while the rower started the boat down-stream, towing the log behind it. It was necessary to watch carefully lest the upper end of the log should be carried out into the current. When that happened, the man in the stern had only to knock out the “dog” and then the log was allowed to float down and go over the dam where it was caught and held in the eddy, Then it was drawn up to the mill by oxen.

“Fred Freeman was one of the men who worked at this dangerous occupation and has told the story many times of his narrow escape from death. He and Harrison Hanchett went up

from the mill to get a log from the boom. After it was secured they started on the return trip. Soon Freeman, who was at the oars, noticed that the log was getting out into the current and without turning his head said quietly, "Knock out the dog". But Hanchett did not comply. So leaving the oars he went to the stern where Hanchett sat white and motionless and knocked out the dog himself. By that time they had drifted into swift water, and Mr. Sumner, watching from the shore, said to himself that that was the last they'd ever see of Hanchett and Freeman. But Freeman, with intrepid courage and great strength, soon guided the boat to safety, while his companion, petrified with terror, was unable to lift a finger.

"Adam Crandall was one of the early settlers and a Revolutionary War soldier. His son Aaron W. was the father of Aaron Crandall who the present generation remembers. The first Aaron was a blacksmith and had a shop and house on the "Plain", nearly opposite the road that leads to the "Falls". He was also a lumberman and teamster. When the river was high was the best time to make rafts of the logs and float great loads of lumber – tons of it at a time, and take it down the river to Middletown. At night it was the custom to tie the raft to trees on the bank, and camp there until morning, with a rope at each end of the raft. One time when Mr. Crandall was "helping" do this difficult task of "snubbing" the raft, as it was called, he inadvertently stepped into one of the coils of the rope which lay along the bank, and as the swift current bore the raft along, snapping the rope taut, his leg was instantly cut off, as with a pair of shears, and hurled forty feet into the bushes.

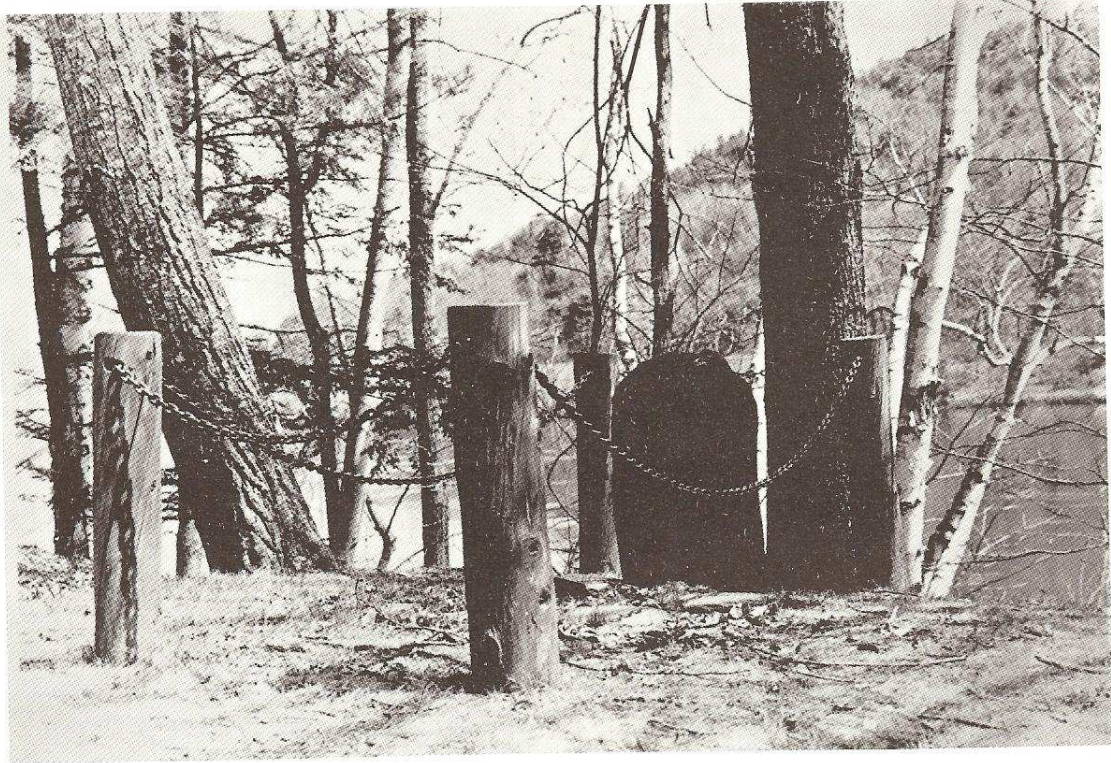
"The blacksmith shop was moved in later years, taken down and hauled, one side at a time, to the farm on the Quechee Road where it was again set up and used for some purpose."

## **Now from Wilbur's Daughter, Florence Sturtevant.**

"An interesting bit of history came to light in connection with the death of a riverman many years ago at Sumner's Falls in the Connecticut River, near this town.

"Mr. J.G. Underwood, who heard the story in a hotel in Groveton, a small town in northern New Hampshire, tells it as follows.

"As we sat talking, one of my acquaintances asked me where I was living now. When I told him Hartland, an old man who sat near us said "Isn't there a Falls in the river there? I buried a man there."



“When asked how it happened, he explained. “It was in 1874. (The stone clearly says 1895. C.Y.M.) I had charge of the rear of the drive. One of our men went into the water near Wilder.”

“This was a characteristic expression meaning that he fell into the water and was drowned.

“Several days later the body was found at the Falls in Hartland. They sent for me. His name was Barber, a nice boy, ---Fred, I think they called him, but he was a fine boy. I tied the body to a tree and sent for the selectmen. But the authorities wouldn’t let the boy be buried in their cemetery, and the minister wouldn’t even come and say a few words over him. Some people in those days didn’t think much of river men. Course, we had some that were tough sometimes, but as a general thing we were a pretty good sort of folks.”

“The narrator went on: “The boy’s father came down. He was a hard man, a mean man. The boys had chipped in, two dollars apiece, to buy the boy a casket. When the father asked how much pay was coming to him I passed the word around to the boys and we all took back our two dollars, so that the father wouldn’t get it himself. We bought the casket afterwards, but the father didn’t want any casket, and wouldn’t even pay for taking the body home. So we buried the boy where he was, on high ground near the river bank. We put stones over the

casket first, before filling in with dirt. I have visited the grave a number of times since and kept it in repair.”

“When was the last time you visited it?” he was asked. “Let’s see. I’m seventy-six now. I was forty-eight then. How many does that make?” Twenty-eight, he was told.

“Yes, twenty-eight years ago. Is the grave still there?” He was assured that it was, and in good condition.

“We put up a stone and marked it.” He said, “Is it still there?” He seemed gratified that the stone was still there after so many years.

“The speaker is a fine looking old man. Strong and well preserved.

“As for the boy’s name, it was found to be Charlie, not Fred and old residents remember the circumstances well. They also tell of several Hartland men who were expert river men in former times, among whom were Fred Freeman and Milton Short. It was a job which called for quick thinking, good judgment, strength and courage.”

## **Memories from Walter Hatch**

A portion of an article by Walter Hatch called “Lumbering and Trees in Hartland”

“Any account of lumbering in Hartland should include mention of David Sumner, the early mill operator. The Old Sumner Saw Mill was at the lower dam listed in the Lull Brook Dam Sites and at that time Sumner is believed to have lived near the mill. Later he built the house now owned by ..... (Sumner Mansion, C.Y.M.).

“Sumner also built dams and mills at Sumner’s Falls and bridges near the outlet of Lull Brook into Plainfield, New Hampshire. He and partners (sic) acquired large holdings of timber in Northern Vermont and started log drives down the Connecticut River to mills at Bellows Falls, Vermont and Holyoke, Mass.

My boyhood was spent in Springfield, Vermont, on the river, and the log drive was a thrill in each springtime. I remember the horse rafts, the cook raft, the camp fires by the river and long black boats with six or eight oarsmen, the sweep used to clear eddies, and the race by boats to the camp for supper.”

Walter was Marjorie Royce’s father. How exciting it must have been to live in those times.

## Lucia

Now, for all of you who have skipped by “Sumner’s Falls” to see if I have anything from Lucia, I won’t disappoint. What an inspiration this lady is. C.Y.M.

### “Ten Fingers to Read With”

“It was three days after Pearl Harbor. The peace of our world lay shattered like a goblet thrown to the ground and most of us were still shivering from the sound, when I found myself at the eye clinic and heard the oculist telling me that soon I would not see enough to read a book or newspaper. He hurried to say that although my eyes would grow much worse, I probably would never be wholly blind.

Have you ever looked out into the back yard of a city tenement? I remember one. It was bare of everything except a tired, dusty burdock in one corner. A high board fence closed it in completely. A wash that had never seen super-suds flapped overhead. As the doctor held my coat and spoke a compassionate good-bye I was sure my life would soon be spent in just such a closed in space. I could almost hear the alley cats yowling there at night. But before I reached the car I realized that no board fence was ever tall enough to shut out entirely the sunlight, the breezes and the song of birds.

Next morning I began teaching myself touch typing. I felt that when my handwriting grew illegible my friends could still read my letters. It has proved a tall but narrow opening in my board fence. There are many other things that helped break down my wall until so much sun shone in that the grass grew, lilies-of-the-valley blossomed and a small brook wandered across one corner calling the birds for their morning bath.

Of all the openings the one that has been the most useful and has given me the most freedom has been the reading and writing of Braille – the system of raised dots by which the blind can read and write. I was told that a person of seventy was foolish to try to learn anything so difficult – that I could never hope to be proficient in the art and that I did not need it anyway since talking books furnished all the reading one could wish. Still I persisted.

As was predicted, I have never learned to read swiftly but it is a real pleasure to hold a book in my hands and learn for myself what it has to say. Sometimes, when I choose to read, the sound of the talking book would disturb a visitor; then the Braille book is a refuge. Many sleepless hours in the night have been made happy by a good Braille story.

As far as the idea that all the reading you need is to be had in the talking book records I have not found it so. For instance, Shakespeare is not listed in my catalogue of records but I have lately enjoyed a copy of The Merchant of Venice in Braille.

If you plan to spend a few days with a friend it seems only kind to furnish yourself with something to occupy part of your time, and a Braille book can be carried in one’s suit case while a talking book machine would prove awkward to carry as well as a nuisance to your friends household.

Living alone, as I do, and keeping house for myself would not be as easy as it is without the help of a Braille and stylus. Cooking, for instance, is not the guess work it would be if I had not made me a card catalog of recipes, adding to it, from time to time, as I had opportunity. When I acquire jars of fruits or vegetables, cans of soup or of fruit juices or boxes of mixes and pudding powders, I fasten a Braille label on each one. Then, unless I have made a mistake, as has happened (of course, I always have company at such a time) it is quite simple to get a

meal. The lists I can feel of and then call over the phone to the grocery clerk, and the pages of Braille that take the place of my old address book save my having to ask help nearly as often. And such a glow that comes over me when the postman hands me a letter from a comrade written in Braille!!" Lucia Webster Comstock

## Society News

A great deal of the winter was occupied with the writing of the cookbook. It is finished with 83 pages of Hartland recipes. An order form is included with your dues form or they may be picked up at Damon Hall (save the postage).

The Annual Meeting will be held on May 20. We have scheduled a "For Members Only" event. We are renting a school bus to take a three hour tour of Hartland. The ever entertaining Clyde Jenne will guide us to the locations of all the schoolhouses. Some are still standing but many have succumbed to the ravages of time and have left behind only a small trace. At about the half way point we will stop at Sumners Falls where you may wander around, have refreshments,(buy a cookbook) visit the grave site of the drowned river man and where we will hold a short annual business meeting. This is when we elect our Officers and Directors for the coming year. The only change in the slate is the addition of Sandy Palmer to be a Director for the next three years. The bus will leave the Elementary School at 1 P.M. Please be aware that there are no bathroom facilities available.

Gifts continue to help us grow and make it possible to continue offering important services to many people. This time I would like to acknowledge monetary gifts from Timothy Rockwood and Ildolyn Ahearn and "things "from: Deborah Luquer who gave us postcards, maps, Grange program, ribbon and pin, a "Twin Elm Gunshop" matchbook cover, a Leonard Bros ad and a 1906 "The Vermonter". The Shepard family gave us some old Town Reports and a large photo of Fairview Farm taken from the back. Ellen White, a Penniman Descendant gave us many pictures of the Penniman and Damon families, an extensive genealogy and other items of interest. And lastly, I want to thank all of you who shared your family recipes with us. I was not able to use them all, but they are all saved and in a box with the others in our collection. A huge thank you to everyone!!

The printing press is coming along. Bob Barrett did a wonderful job of cleaning it and getting all the parts to move freely. Bob Peeler is getting new rollers as the ones with it had hardened with age. Someday we will have a chase with type and be able to print off a little souvenir of your visit to the Historical Society.

As you can see "Dues are Due" I don't need to reiterate how important it is to us that you continue your membership. We have questions to answer from all over the country. We owe a great debt to Beverly Lasure and Brad Hadley for all the work that they do on our website. Visit if you haven't recently [www.hartlandhistory.org](http://www.hartlandhistory.org). We have many visitors including school and scout groups, students working on papers and especially, people searching their family lines.

We plan to be at Farm Fest with cookbooks for sale and at Expo in Tunbridge with a Civil War exhibit. As usual, we will be open on Fourth of July.