

HARTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. 297 – 14 ROUTE 12
HARTLAND, VERMONT 05048

WWW.HARTLANDHISTORY.ORG

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2010

DAVID HUBBARD SUMNER

Died August 29, 1867 Funeral, August 31

(Taken from his funeral service) "Our departed friend, Mr. Sumner was born in Claremont, N.H. Dec. 7, 1776, and removed to this town at about the age of 27 years. Since that time, this has been his residence. Here then, my friends among you and your ancestors for two generations, was his home for much more than half a century. His business capacity and relations have made his name familiar throughout a large portion of this valley."



The beautiful and charming home that David Sumner built has graced Hartland for more than 200 years. Now its appearance has changed as the front lawn is held back with retaining blocks to accommodate the new sidewalk.

I have often thought of doing a piece about Mr. Sumner but was scared off by the very amount that we have on this man and his family. The Historical Society has more than five feet of shelf space and many boxes of material relating to him, his businesses, and family. We have Howland Atwood to thank for transcribing all the letters and adding the related history that is relevant to this man and his family.

Now, from a biography written by David's son-in-law, The Honorable Benjamin Steele.

"Mr. Sumner was born Dec. 7, 1776 at Claremont. N.H. upon the place known as" The Cupola Farm" at the mouth of the Sugar River (still standing, C.Y.M.) Col Benjamin Sumner was a land surveyor and a man of considerable wealth. It was his purpose to give his son, David the advantages of a liberal education, but before entering college, David expressed a decided preference for mercantile life and accordingly was placed as a clerk in the storein White River Jct. After some service there he commenced in business for himself. In 1805 he married Martha Foxcroft...who died childless in 1824. Soon after this marriage, the Sumner's moved from Claremont to Hartland and engaged in trade at that place. At this time they built the house that would be the Sumner family home for almost 150 years. This business he continued for many years with considerable success. In 1809 he opened a store in Middleton, Conn. and continued a business there as well. During the war of 1812, being thoroughly in sympathy with the war party, he became Captain of the Hartland militia company. In 1813 and 1814, Mr. Sumner represented Hartland at the State Legislature. About 1814 he was appointed postmaster of Hartland. He resigned from this office in 1833.

Soon after coming to Hartland, Mr. Sumner interested himself in the development of the town by building roads, some of them at his own expense, and also in bridging the Connecticut River between Hartland and Plainfield, and establishing mills in Hartland. With partners, Mr. Sumner incorporated the Hart Island Bridge Company, a toll bridge. (In one letter to his wife, while he was away, he cautioned her to remember to get the men to "snow the bridge" so sleighs could travel through. C.Y.M.) The first bridge and the replacement bridge were both destroyed by spring freshets and, in 1859 after the second loss; he established a ferry service rather than rebuild yet again. He also lost a toll bridge over the Conn. in Dalton, N.H.

In the early years of the Connecticut Valley, the river was used for the transportation of goods by rafts to and from market. This required the building of canals at the various falls. (Hartland has just acquired the land at Sumner's Falls. C.Y.M.) Prominent men in town, including David Sumner formed the "Water Quechee Falls Canal Company" for the purpose of rendering the Connecticut navigable about a mile north of Hartland Village. Canals and through locks were put at the falls. Extensive lumber mills were also maintained by Mr. Sumner at the same point for many years.

The coming of the railroad provided a different means to move goods and eventually the competition was too great for the continuance of river travel.

In 1817, Mr. Sumner purchased of the widow, and heirs of the widow, of the Royal Governor Benning Wentworth, all the unsold lots of land in Vt. and N.H. known as the governor's rights. These lands were the 500 acre lots reserved by the Gov. in each charter of his N.H. grants. The early acquaintance and friendship which existed between Gov. Wentworth and Col. Benjamin Sumner, and their families resulted in giving Mr. Sumner an opportunity to make

this purchase. The land, being widely scattered, the purchase threw upon Mr. Sumner considerable labor and the defense of them caused him considerable litigation.

Mr. Sumner was married to his second wife, Wealthy Thomas of Windsor in 1839. There were two children of this marriage. Martha (Mattie) (named after his first wife!) born in 1840 and David, Jr. born in 1842. The son after a brief illness died a few days before the father in Aug 1867. The young man who was thus cut off in the proud strength of a youth which promised long life and usefulness had already taken upon himself the responsibilities of his father's affairs and his loss was deeply felt."

It is pretty much felt that the "beloved pines" which are mentioned in his funeral service, are still flanking the Sumner Mansion. The small house right on the road at the corner with Rte 5 and Station Rd. was Mr. Sumner's office and was moved from a spot up near the house. Mrs. Sumner also ran a school for small children at the mansion, and this office may have started life as her schoolhouse. The Mowry's barn was moved from the mansion to where it is now attached to their house. Benjamin Steele and his wife, Mattie moved to Hartland after the deaths of the two Davids but Mr. Steele also died at a young age leaving Wealthy, Mattie and their two children, David and Mary. Mary never married and became a teacher of music in Chicago. One of her pupils advanced to the level of Grand Opera. She died in 1937 at the Brattleboro Retreat on the same day that her brother died in Boston. The funerals were held in the Brick Church on the same day. Long before Mary's death she wrote an interesting will in which she directed that the family's stones be changed in the Village Cemetery. Her father, The Honorable Benjamin Steele, has a monument in keeping with his station in life. Then there are very small and simple monuments to David, Wealthy, Mattie, Mary, and David Steele. David's wife, Edith Putnam Steele is there with a different style marker. The stones are not where the bodies are, and the dates are wrong on David Sumner Sr's. There is no stone for David Jr. although he is buried there. This is according to Fannie Richardson Sturtevant, a neighbor and lifelong friend of the family.

We have a great deal of correspondence that was received at the Sumner household. I only wish we had that that went out. Our glimpses of Hartland life come only through the responses to issues from friends and family.

Letters from David Sumner make me think that maybe he should have taken advantage of his father's offer of further education. Here are excerpts from a letter sent by Mr. Sumner while in Greenfield, Ma. To C.F. Brigham at Hartland. " An other thing I wish you explicablely attend to Viz Tell H.B. Sumner that it is extremely dangerous for that Little David to be riding back and forward on the wagon which go after Hay and Grain and aske him to forbid it Viz forbid David Riding and tell Wm and Guy not to let David go near team Waggon Loaded or unloaded.

I have had another great anxiety about Mrs Sumners roading out with the Children Since she like to have run off the Bank and Since Rinaldo and his wife both like to have got Kild I do not like to have her and the children Riden out alone or either of them with her alone at Least she ought to have Hellen or Some one Stronger. I am fearfull that Some of harnefs may give way or Some other difficulty might attend and horse Run as Reneldoes did. I am fearful if they Should turn over in the Chais or Run away with it being so high it would kill them."

This was written in August 1852.

Mr. Sumner would really have had something to worry about if Mrs. Sumner rode a motorcycle. The following is from an undated news clip. C.Y.M.

DEATH CAME FROM MOTORCYCLE SPILL

Wilfred Henry and Miss Elsie Carter Overturned While Motoring Sunday – Accident Resulted in Death of Henry.

The toll of accidents usually identified with Sunday throughout New England included one near at hand to Windsor last Sunday.

The victim of this accident was Wilfred Henry, a young man, aged 27.

The circumstances of the sad affair are as follows: Mr. Henry and Miss Elsie Carter of Melrose, Mass., the latter being a visitor in these parts, went in Mr. Henry's motorcycle to White River Junction for a short afternoon trip. Miss Carter occupied the side seat which is attached to the grade of vehicle owned by Henry. Included in the party in an automobile was Mrs. Carter, mother of Elsie and three sisters of Elsie, as follows, Margery, Constance and Doris. George Oliver of Windsor acted as the driver of the auto.

These people were on their return trip to Windsor when the trouble occurred. The auto party was some distance ahead of the motorcyclists at a point near No. Hartland when Mrs. Carter said that since Elsie and her chaperone did not catch up with the rest, she thought that it would be a good idea to retrace the course of the auto and see what had happened. The auto party had proceeded but a short distance when they found Elsie alone in the roadway, her clothing torn to shreds and state of mind badly agitated. She explained that while she and Mr. Henry were coasting down the long hill above North Hartland the machine had left its' course, throwing the two over the bank, severely injuring Henry. All hands then went to the scene of the accident and found Mr. Henry unconscious, with the appearance of having sustained several rough wounds. Dr. Drake of White River and Dr. Weston of Windsor were summoned to the scene and the injured man was taken to Hanover Hospital. The accident happened at eight in the evening . Death occurred at four the next morning, the injuries proving to be severe and varied.

Mr. Henry had lived in Windsor over a year and was a machinist in the employ of the National Acme Co. He was a native of the island of Trinidad, British West Indies. His father still resides in that place and a cablegram informing him of the death of his son was sent to him. The elder Henry replied that instructions for the deposition of the body would later be forwarded.

The deceased had recently joined the Vermont Lodge of Masons and this order took charge of the burial service. The body was placed in the tomb of Ascutney Cemetery to await final disposition.

Mr. Henry left a life insurance policy of two thousand dollars, his sister being the beneficiary. The policy had been in force but three days prior to the accident. The sister is now on the ocean en route home.

The fact that Henry had that day made the trip up Mt. Ascutney which fatigued him much, is a tribute as the indirect cause of the accident. A week before he had met with a slight mishap in the same machine near Ascutneyville."

Maybe Mr. Henry needed a dose of :

CALOMEL

Physicians of the highest rank
To pay their fees we need a bank
Combine all wisdom, art and skill
-----and-----in Calomel
When Mr. A or B is sick
To call the Dr. and be quick
The Dr. comes with much good will
But never forgets his Calomel

He takes his patient by his hand
And compliments him as his friend
He sits awhile his pulse to feel
And then takes out his Calomel
He then turns to the patients wife
Have you clean paper, spoon and knife
I think your husband would do well
To take a dose of calomel

He then deals out the precious grain
This ma'am I'm sure will ease his pain
Once in three hours by toll of bell
Give him a dose of Calomel
The man grows worse quite fast indeed
To call the Dr. ride with speed
The Dr. comes post haste by mail
Doubling his dose of Calomel

The man in death begins to groan
The fatal job for him is done
He dies , alas but sure to tell
A sacrifice to Calomel
But when I must resign my breath

Pray let me die a natural death
And bid the world a long farewell

Without one dose of Calomal.

Unknown author

Carol Mowry, Editor

Some news from the society

Rosemary and Carol continue to be busy at the Society with requests, cataloging and the occasional visitor. We are closed on Friday for the winter but still manage to be here more than one day a week, although we don't always put the sign out!

One night this fall we were able to entertain and be entertained by, a wonderful group of Cub Scouts. Their interest in things old is a joy.

Mandy Potter has made a very generous offer to send these newsletters out by e-mail. If you would like to help us save money and paper we can set you up accordingly. Many people would rather not get so much in the mail which goes into the recycle. If you are one of those just e-mail Mandy at mandoolap@aol.com. On the subject line would you put Historical Society so that Mandy will know that it is of importance? We will continue to send this by snail mail if that is what you prefer.

Through the generosity of Rosemary and Bob Morancy, we now have a scanner with which we plan to scan our photo collection. We are doing this for the purpose of protecting this wonderful asset, and to be able to present shows for the public's enjoyment. We hope to have a show up and running for the 250th celebration in 2011. You will hear more about that later.

We have scheduled a wonderful program for early spring. Something to look forward to! Bill Hosley who is a historic resources and education consultant from Enfield, Conn., will give his program, "Reading Places; Art, Architecture, and Gravestones in Early Vermont" at 2 P.M. on Sunday, March 21, at the Library. "This lecture and slide presentation demonstrates how art and artifacts can be used to understand historical experience while surveying the extraordinary visual allure of historic Vermont". This is brought by the Hartland Historical Society and the Vermont Humanities Council.

For the Vermont Expo in June, we are planning a display of gravestone rubbings with insight into the designs and history of some local carvers.

We have had some wonderful extra donations from the following people since I last wrote to you: Carol Rumrill, Warren Cone, and George Little and Betty Garrand. Also, this newsletter (and the next) are totally backed by the generous donation received from Jay Boeri for this purpose.

We have also been the recipients of wonderful gifts: From Lillian Marcotte we have deeds from the Nancy Darling farm, a child's dress, a grain bag and a petticoat. From Clayton Washburn we have books written by Dr. Samuel Stevens of Hartland, some of which were printed in Hartland. If you are feeling very intellectual you can stop by and peruse "Science and Superstition", "Philosophy of the Great Unconscious", "Immortality", and "Economy of Misery"

I hope the rest of your winter is a good one and I will look forward to seeing you all on March 21.

