



# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

NEWSLETTER & ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2023 - 2024

## Society Happenings

Your Milton Historical Society has been busy with community outreach, collaboration, and building on the reimagining of the museum. After the museum closes for the season on October 26th, the dedicated volunteers will begin planning for the next season. We also take this time to inventory, organize, and document the artifacts, photos, and binders in our collection.

In the lobby of the Municipal Building is a display by Historical Society Board Member Charlie Farrell of the 14 Milton School Districts. Charlie has researched the school districts in Vermont and hosts the Facebook page “Vermont Schoolhouse Project”. Check it out and “Like” his page.

In October of 2023 we hosted a walking tour of the “Village Loop”. It was repeated on the museum opening day on May 4, 2024.

The Holiday Open House, held in December 2023, was a huge success. We recognized the first Junior Historians who completed two Scavenger Hunts during the year. Come join us this year on December 8<sup>th</sup>. As part of the festivities, we will recognize the 2024 Junior Historians.



Milton Schoolhouse Display

In March we organized and hosted a “meet and greet” with area historical societies to learn and share ideas in an effort to improve outreach and participation. We have been contacted regularly for information on our programs and community involvement.

In April 2024, we co-hosted a racing event with the Milton Public Library that brought several racing legends to the Municipal Building parking lot to display their race cars and interact with fans. There were many race themed gift baskets that were designed and donated by Rick and Peggy Stowell. Raffle tickets were available for purchase for a chance to win one of the baskets. Proceeds were shared with the Library and Historical Society. The library conference room was set up with events for the kids to include Hot Wheels racing and arts & crafts. Local author and race car enthusiast, as well as former teacher, Bill Ladabouche, gave a presentation of the history of racing in Milton.



2023 Jr Historians

We once again hosted the Milton Elementary School 4<sup>th</sup> graders to explore the history of our town by participating in the Scavenger Hunt as well as a Historical Walk where students learned about historical homes and businesses in the area. Thank you to Bob Lombard who narrated the walk

## MILTON

### HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TREASURING OUR HERITAGE SINCE 1978

Jim Ballard      Historian      893-7734

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Louis Mossey    *President*    893-1712

Rick Stowell    *Vice President*    893-4546

Peggy Stowell    *Treasurer*    893-4546

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Kate Cadreact    *3 years*    881-5061

Charlie Farrell    *3 years*    893-1085

John Mayville    *3 years*    893-7084

#### Membership

Membership is open to the public. Annual dues are:

Individual \$15.00

Family \$30.00

#### Sponsorship

Business, Family, Individual \$100.00

*Please send form & payment to:*

Milton Historical Society

13 School Street

Milton, VT 05468

### HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

VOLUME 20

2023 - 2024



*Historically Speaking* is a communication instrument of the Milton Historical Society and is published annually. Reader articles and letters are encouraged. Individuals wishing to contribute artifacts should contact the Milton Historical Society, 13 School Street, Milton, VT 05468 or [milthistorical@yahoo.com](mailto:milthistorical@yahoo.com)

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Other events that we hosted include a presentation entitled “The Meaning of Maple” by Michael Lange, historical talk about the country’s presidential elections by Willard Sterne Randall, a wonderful presentation about native owls by the Vermont Audubon Society, Douglas Brooks from the Vermont Humanities Council gave an invigorating presentation about sail ferries and skiffs in Vermont. Jim Jones wrapped up this years series with an exciting presentation about the history of the Island Line Railroad.

The July 4<sup>th</sup> parade is always fun, and Millie enjoys the time out of the museum riding around in the pickup truck. We would love to expand on this amazing community event. Any ideas and volunteering will be most welcomed.

We continue to enhance our exhibits to tell our story. From the beginning of the museum’s reimagining to the grand reopening, the story of our farming roots is a work in progress. This year we added what we call a “Coffee Table Book” entitled “Milton’s Farm Families” built on research and a map by Allen Beaupre of farms that were active in the 1940’s and 1950’s. Please share with us your farming history and photos. The work on this and other aspects of farming in Milton is ongoing and will be added to the exhibit as the information becomes available.

The Friends of the Cemetery committee continues to assist the town in the upkeep of the ten public cemeteries. Volunteers participated in two workdays each in 2023 and 2024. Tax deductible donations may be made to this committee to help with the expenses beyond normal care and maintenance.

The General Stannard House Committee assists with maintenance on the park on RT 7 on the site of the former house while working on the restoration of the house.

Milton High School students have been a big help at the museum, cemeteries, and Stannard Park volunteering during the annual Day of Service in commemoration of 9-11.

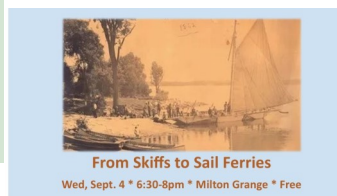
Speaking of our Milton High School students, Patrick Endres was the recipient of our \$1,000.00 college scholarship for 2024. Patrick is studying aviation and is working on his pilot’s license from Vermont State University in Williston.

As this year draws to an end, we will continue to plan events and update the museum. In the upcoming years, we look forward presenting events and information on the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our nation, Vermont as an Independent Republic, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Milton Historical Society.

As always, your support is appreciated. We operate 100% on volunteers, donations, membership, and sponsorship.

Event photos are posted on the next page.

# Event Photos



# The Story of the Lye Stone

by Louis Mossey

On an overcast morning of August 25, 2022, volunteers from the Milton Historical Society, Lou Mossey and Charlie Farrell, Conservation Commission member, Bonnie Pease, whose property the artifact was discovered, along with Town of Milton employees Justin Bergeron, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, and his helper, Milton High School Junior CJ Badger, set off down the trail of the Milton Municipal Forest to retrieve an historic artifact. Milton Historical Society Vice President, Bill Kaigle arranged for lifelong Milton resident Arlon Cross to provide the horsepower with his 4-wheeler. Lou, Charlie, Justin, and CJ provided manpower to lift and tote when necessary. Bonnie provided guidance, history, and moral support. What was this important artifact that necessitated all this attention? It was a leaching stone or lye stone. The goal was to retrieve the artifact without damaging it.

Once the crew hiked the trail from the parking lot, approximately one mile into the Municipal Forest, the lye stone was uncovered from the secret hiding place.



Lye stone retrieval crew members, from left to right, CJ Badger, Justin Bergeron, Lou Mossey, Charlie Farrell, and Arlon Cross prepare for the event in the Milton Town Forest parking lot.



Bonnie Pease, Charlie Farrell, CJ Badger, and Justin Bergeron begin the journey in the Town Forest.

Justin and CJ uncover the lye stone from the secret hiding place.



It was placed and secured on a makeshift gurney covered with a shipping blanket on loan by Historical Society members Joe and Nan Marotti. The blanket helped protect the stone from potential damage. The gurney was used to carry the lye stone down an embankment, through a brook, and up the other side of the embankment, to Arlon's awaiting 4-wheeler.

Charlie, CJ, Lou, and Justin hoist and tote the lye stone to Arlon's awaiting 4-wheeler.



The lye stone was placed and secured to the 4-wheeler. Arlon then zoomed off to the parking lot. The rest of the crew hiked back recounting the success of the adventure. Back at the parking lot the lye stone was placed in Lou's pickup truck for the final journey to the Milton Historical Museum.

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Bill, Charlie, and Lou, slide the lye stone into position for the final journey.

### A series of unintended coincidences

The area in which the lye stone was discovered has a long history. The property is currently owned by Brian and Bonnie Pease and abuts the Town Forest. White settlers first used the land to harvest timber. The rugged terrain was ideal for sheep farming, which was popular through the late 1800's. Dairy farming was the next land use in this area. At one point there were a few farms in the area, the Martell farm, and the Marquette farm. The land was cleared for grazing fields and crop growing. When farming was abandoned in the area, beavers took over and created a large dam that created Milton Marsh. The Milton Marsh Trail is part of the old Marquette Road and provides a scenic view of the marsh. The Milton Marsh Bypass Trail was constructed due to wet conditions on the Milton Marsh trail and was cooler in the heat of Summer. In 2018 the beaver dam blew out and washed down the trail. According to Bonnie Pease, "During Covid a "mystery stone mason", decided to relocate a small section of the Marsh Bypass Trail (on our (Pease) property) and install

stone steps wherever they felt it would be better. This put the trail away from the official trail signage.



Wagon wheel rim in the trail

Once folks started using that small, relocated section, unauthorized metal detector people found the edge of the metal wagon wheel rim, and tried to pull it from the soil. I think in trying to dig that out, someone uncovered the lye stone, but I have no idea". Scott Dillon, the State Archeologist, was contacted about the lye stone that had been discovered. He contacted Dan Gaherty, the Chairman of the Milton Conservation Commission, to let him know of this important discovery. A chance meeting of Dan and Lou at Lowe's in Essex, led to the Historical Society's efforts to retrieve the stone and move it to the museum for display. Brian and Bonnie Pease have graciously donated the lye stone to the Milton Historical Society for preservation and display. It is now a part of the Washroom Exhibit inside the Museum for all to enjoy.

### Who owned the lye stone?

Since the type of material that the stone is made from is determined to be gneiss, which is not native to the area, how did it get there? Gneiss is found in mostly in Central Vermont as is granite.

According to <http://geologyscience.com/rocks/metamorphic-rocks/gneiss/>,

"Gneiss is a foliated metamorphic rock that is a common distribute type of rock high-grade regional metamorphic approaches from pre-current formations that have been initially both igneous or sedimentary rocks. It has a glorious banding which is apparent on microscopic scale and hand specimen. It usually is prominent from schist by its foliation and schistosity; displays a properly advanced foliation and a poorly advanced schistosity and cleavage."

In the spring of 2003, the Town of Milton contracted with LIA Consultants to do an inventory and assessment of the natural features of the Municipal (Town) Forest on Westford Road. The very detailed assessment was completed in May 2003 and can be accessed on the Town website via the Conservation Commission. (<http://vt-milton.civicplus.com/274/Conservation-Commission>)

In Section One of the report, under Cultural Resources, is an extensive evaluation of the people and land use of the area. Native Americans as well as European settlers inhabited the land over time. In the late 1700's, the Austin and Allen families were one of the earliest known settlers in the area. Through the next 150 years, the property changed

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# Soap Making

by Charlie Farrell

hands, to include owners Nutly, Coburn, Perry, Crown, Smith, Martell, Powell, Marquette, and Phelps. According to the 1869 Beers Map of Milton, there was a road in the area of the lye stone, known as the Marquette Road, the remnants of which can still be seen. The cellar hole adjacent to the trail is said to have belonged to the Marquette family. Considering the lye stone was used during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries on the family farm, it is likely one of these families brought it with them. But we may never know precisely who.

One other consideration is that of a local craftsman who manufactured lye stones for sale to area residents. Evidence of such a venture has not been substantiated, however. The mystery continues.

## Potash, Lye and Soap

The early Vermont settlers were often miles from their closest neighbors and even further from a general store. This meant that they needed to be self-sufficient. Most everything used by the household had to be either grown on the farm or made at home. Soap was an example of this self-sufficiency. Today we purchase many and varied forms of soap at our grocery store, but the early settlers had to manufacture their own soap.

The process of soap making involved a number of steps. The first step involved producing potash. Potash is made from burning hardwood trees down into ashes. In the late 1700's and early 1800's in Vermont, there was an abundant supply of hardwood trees to burn.

The first settlers were predominantly farmers so when they purchased their plots of land, they needed to clear cut the property to establish their farmstead. These were virgin forests with immense trees. It was a monumental task to cut down these forests and the easiest way to dispose of the downed trees was to burn them. This meant a ready supply of potash. Potash was produced on the farmsteads and at larger commercial operations. In fact, potash became an important early export from Vermont, and West Milton once had one of these businesses. Once processed, potash (potassium carbonate) could be used in the manufacturing of fertilizer, textiles and soap. Pearl ash was a more refined form of potash, and it was used in glassmaking, gunpowder production and as a leavening agent in baking.

The very first patent issued in the United States was to a Vermonter for a potash producing process. On July 31, 1790, Samuel Hopkins received a patent for an innovative way of making "pot ash and pearl ash". This patent was numbered 000001 and was actually signed by George Washington.

The next step in soap production was to process the potash to produce lye. This was basically a leaching process. It was a simple set up using potash, a barrel, a lye stone and rainwater.



Laundry Day

Continued on page 6

The full-sized barrel would have holes drilled in the bottom. It would have a layer of coarse gravel placed on the bottom of the barrel directly over the holes. On top of the gravel a layer of straw or vegetation would be positioned. The gravel and straw would act as a simple filtration system.

The barrel would then be placed on top of a lye stone. A lye stone was a slab of durable stone with a series of grooves carved into its surface. The grooves typically are a large circle positioned to the inside circumference of the barrel's bottom and then a second straight groove that funnels the drained liquid into a collection container. The stone was usually made of granite or gneiss because it could handle the caustic lye without dissolving.

Then the barrel would be packed with potash and the rainwater would be poured through the ashes to leach out the brownish liquid lye. The liquid would drain through the barrel's bottom holes and then flow into the grooves of the lye stone to a waiting bucket.

Once the lye had been procured it was time for soap making. This was an outdoor chore. The lye would be combined with animal fat and boiled in a kettle until the proper consistency was achieved.

The most difficult part of soap making was gauging the strength of the lye water. One common test was to place an egg or small potato into the lye. If the egg or potato floated about halfway beneath the surface of the solution it was at a proper strength. If the egg or potato sank to the bottom the solution was too weak and if the egg or potato floated high in the solution it was too strong.

Another test of the solution's strength involved dipping a chicken or goose feather into the solution. If the feather dissolved then the lye water was strong enough for soap making.

In addition to this laborious process, the homemade soap was nasty. It lacked the moisturizers and perfumes of our modern soap. The lye soap was the universal, household soap. It was used for laundry, baths and dishes. The lye soap was harsh to the skin. It would often leave your hands raw and sore and your hair would be left dry and brittle. The overall process and product makes me appreciate my bar of Irish Spring, my Head & Shoulders and my Tide laundry detergent.

Visit the **Milton Historical Museum** to learn more about soap-making. The **Wash Day Exhibit** has interesting artifacts on this weekly task. The **Lye Stone** is prominently displayed here



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