

---

# NEWBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## Newsletter Volume 19, No.1 Spring, 2023

---

### Report of the Board of Directors

The Newbury Historical Society continues to remain active but is looking for members to serve on the Board of Directors. We have lots of ideas but need help executing them.

One of our activities is overseeing the Town's Boston Post (Bicentennial) Cane. Last year we presented it to resident Barbara Billings, who turned 100 on May 7, 2022. (See related story in this newsletter.)

In May the NHS collaborated with the Newbury Public Library, John Hay Poetry Society and Literary Arts Guild of The Center for the Arts, for a multimedia presentation based on *Visual Verse – Snapshots in Time*, a volume of poetry and photographs from the collections of seven Lake Sunapee-area historical societies. The program was held in the Vets Hall, where the poets read their works inspired by photographs from the NHS collection and the NHS provided historical context.

In October, the NHS hosted John C. Porter, who spoke on "The History of Agriculture as Told by Barns." Mr. Porter told how the evolution of barn architecture tells the story of N.H. agriculture, that barns changed from early English style to Yankee style, to gambrel and then pole barns. This well-attended presentation was a chronological walk through time, with photo illustrations of barns around the state that are examples of these eras of agricultural history, including Newbury's stone barn on Route 103A.

In November, members of the NHS helped repair a broken gravestone and replace a sign in the Gillingham Cemetery. Working with Fannin-Lehner Preservation Consultants of Lexington, Mass., Deane Geddes and John Lyons learned about gravestone repairs while providing some of the labor. The gravestone was cleaned using D/2 Biological Solution, which we learned cleans without damaging the surface of the stone. The refurbished stone was then set in a new concrete slotted base.

In other news, the NHS website has moved to: [www.newburynhhistorical.org](http://www.newburynhhistorical.org). The Gallery page currently has photos of winter activities; collecting sap, snow rollers for winter roads, etc.

In April the Historical Society will tell the story of bringing the railroad to Newbury by conquering the massive granite Newbury Cut in a slide show by John Lyons at the Fells meeting room. It will also be presented at the Community Room in Newbury town office complex at a later date.

*Board of Directors:* Paula Falkowski, Deane Geddes, John Lyons, Gay Sheary, Bill Weiler and Margie Weiler.

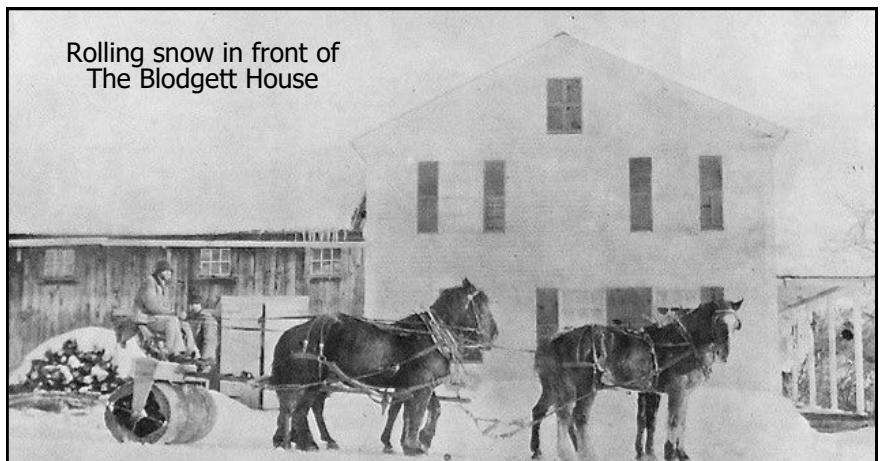
#### *Contact Information:*

Newbury Historical Society  
P.O. Box 176  
Newbury, NH 03255  
<http://www.newburynhhistorical.org/>

**(NOTE: NEW WEB ADDRESS)**

**REMINDER:  
MEMBERSHIP  
RENEWAL!**

Rolling snow in front of  
The Blodgett House



## History of the Newbury Canes

The original article was by Tracy W. Messer, President of the Newbury Historical Society, dated June 25, 1989; it has since been updated by William Weiler and Paula Falkowski.

In Newbury, New Hampshire, the tradition of passing a cane from one elder statesman to another seems to have begun with the Sunapee Lake Grange. In March, 1892, the Grange voted to purchase a cane for **William H. Sawyer** who was, most likely, the group's eldest member. It was understood that the gift would cost no more than \$5.00 and no less than \$3.00. Following the first recipient's death, the cane was passed to **David D. Rowe** in March 1895. Upon that occasion, Brother Rowe declared, "I will accept the cane and thank you. When I am done with it, I want it presented to the oldest brother in the grange."

And so it was passed along: in 1907 it was handed to **Sprague A. Morse**; in 1914, **Jonathan A. Merrill**; in 1926, **Nathan B. Bly**; in 1927, **Charles Newman**; in 1931, **George Kidder**; and in 1932, **Allen Jones**. In December of 1932, the cane, described as gold-headed, was presented to **Eugene S. Muzzey**. Interestingly, the minutes noted that "Bro. F[rank P.] Spaulding [is] oldest, but already has cane."

The last bearer of the Grange cane was **Sidney C. Merrill**, who held it from December of 1934 until his death a year later. It was at this time the Grange cane was lost. In January of 1939 the "question of the grange cane" was discussed, but no action was taken to continue the tradition. Whether or not this custom was unique to Sunapee Lake Grange or was typical of other granges is uncertain.

In an issue of the Bay State Historical League Bulletin, Ross W. Beales, Jr. reported that "in 1909 Edwin A. Grozier, editor of the *Boston Post*, distributed gold-headed canes to chairmen of boards of selectmen in 700 New England towns, asking that the canes be presented to the oldest citizen of each town and thereafter be transmitted to successive oldest citizens." The cane was especially manufactured by J. F. Fradley & Co. of New York and featured a stick of African Gabon ebony and a head of rolled 14-karat gold. Each was inscribed as follows:

PRESENTED BY  
The Boston Post  
TO THE  
OLDEST CITIZEN  
OF

A blank space was provided whereby the name of the town could be engraved locally, if so desired. There is little evidence to verify that Newbury was actually included among the 700 New England towns to receive a Boston Post cane.

Unfortunately, there is no list of which towns received them. A cursory glance at the *Argus & Spectator* and the *Republican Champion* reveals no mention of the Boston Post cane under the Newbury news during the latter part of 1909, and none of the long-time residents could recall if anyone in Newbury ever received one. In fact, the only suggestion that Newbury may have received a Boston Post cane is the Grange secretary's reference to another cane being in the possession of **Frank Spaulding**.

In honor of Newbury's Bicentennial, the tradition of a cane honoring the eldest resident was revived by the Women's Helpful Organization of South Newbury. Sandy Gove, as reported in the *Argus Champion*, "hunted through antique shops, novelty stores and theater prop rooms for several

weeks, [stating] she finally located [an] old cane with appropriate age for the occasion in a Newport antique shop."

The silver-headed stick was dated 1794 and the bore initials "J.M." The understanding was that it once belonged to James Madison, fourth President of the United States. On July 29, 1978, Newbury Selectmen James Wright, George Beal, and Frank Veazie presented the cane to the town's oldest resident, 98-year-old **Moses Herman Bly**. Mr. Bly was a descendant of original settlers and lived to be 100 years old. At the time of his death in 1980, it was discovered that this cane had also been misplaced.

To ensure that the custom would continue, Mr. Bly's niece, Florence (Bly) Perkins, arranged to procure a replacement. A block of cherry (?) was acquired from George E. Alexander & Son Wood Products of Sunapee. The bronze "Newbury Bicentennial souvenir" medallion was provided by Mrs. Perkins' daughter-in-law, Dotty Perkins. The materials were brought to Nicholas Scaleria, a craftsman from the neighboring town of Goshen, who turned the stick and embedded the medallion.

The new Bicentennial Cane was presented to **Dominic Digilio** on June 19, 1982, his 94th birthday. A native of Venosa, Italy, Mr. Digilio came to Newbury in 1904. He raised a family of six children and actively tended his farm on Baker Hill for more than 80 years. Mr. Digilio lived to be 99 years of age.

At the March, 1989 town meeting, Frank Yager made the motion that the responsibility for overseeing the transmission of the Bicentennial Cane be transferred from the Selectmen to the Newbury Historical Society. The motion was adopted unanimously. After considerable research, the Society determined that the cane should be presented to the oldest person, male or female, who is on the town checklist and has lived in town for a minimum of ten years. It is understood that, should the bearer move away from the general community, the cane shall then be passed along to his or her successor.

The Bicentennial Cane was next presented to **James Wright** of Mt. Sunapee on June 25, 1989 when he was 92 years old. Born in Ellenburg, New York, he was one of approximately 800 surviving veterans of the first World War. Throughout his professional life, "Pop" Wright worked as a farmer, a contractor, a mason, and a sawyer. In 1928, he and his wife, Minnie (Fortune) Wright, bought the 200-year-old farmhouse in which he lived for the rest of his life. The couple raised two children, Virginia and James Marvin.

On June 19, 1999 the Newbury Bicentennial Cane was presented to 95-year-old **Florence Bly Perkins**. She was a most fitting recipient, since she was the one who arranged for the crafting of this cane after the previous one was lost. A lifelong resident of Newbury, she was a member of the Grange and contributed to the preservation of Newbury history by writing a little book entitled "Grammies Memories." She also prepared and presented two albums of photographs to the library. Mrs. Perkins was the wife of Merton and had two children, Richard and Janice.



The cane was next presented on July 15, 2001 to **George Gilbert Ferren**, who was born on August 7, 1906 in Alston,

Massachusetts. Mr. Ferren and his wife, Dorothy, made Newbury their permanent home in 1970, though they had been coming up here for skiing vacations since the 1950s. Together, they raised a family of four sons and one daughter. Professionally, he worked in the air conditioning business for many years and was a longtime employee of Harvard University. Mr. Ferren was a lifelong athlete and sportsman. An avid skier, he ranked top in his age group in NASTAR races. He started the rifle club in North Reading, Massachusetts, earned many medals for his sharp-shooting, and went on to become the head of the Massachusetts Rifle Association. As a young man, Mr. Ferren ran in the Boston Marathon, completing along with multiple-time winner, Clarence Demar of Reading.

On December 16, 2006, the cane was presented to **Helen Appleby**, who was born 99 years earlier on April 3 in Dover, NH. With her husband Earl, she raised two sons. They in turn gave her five grandchildren. The Applebys first visited Newbury in 1948 and liked it so much they became residents in 1950. Mrs. Appleby's career was that of wife and mother, but she also found time to contribute to her community. She was active in the Methodist church and was president of the Women's Group for a number of years. She also was a member of the New London Hospital Auxiliary for over twenty years. In addition, she found satisfaction in being an accomplished pianist.



On October 4, 2008, the tradition continued. The distinguished recipient of the Newbury Bicentennial Cane was **William Henry ("Bill") Schroeder**. He was born March 2, 1913 in Patterson, NJ and grew up in nearby Totowa, NJ. Mr. Schroeder spent nearly all of his working career in the installation of high voltage distribution lines, working for both Public Service of Newark and other private contractors.

He worked on several large projects in the New Jersey area, including the New Jersey Turnpike, Fort Dix, and the Westinghouse plants. In his leisure time, he enjoyed a lifetime of hunting and fishing. Following his retirement in 1978, he relocated to Newbury in 1982. Mr. Schroeder and his wife Marilyn had two children, William, Jr. and Marion Schroeder.

On April 9, 2015, **Violet Jones**, 101, became the recipient of the Bicentennial Cane. Born in Leesport, Pennsylvania on June 13, 1913, Violet was the daughter of Edna (Mockmeyer) and Albert Kauffman. Violet married Arthur W. Jones in 1945 while she was working in the New York Port of Embarkation, Brooklyn, NY, and Arthur was serving in the U.S. Army Military Police. They moved to Claremont, NH shortly thereafter, and in 1953 purchased the Lake Sunapee Lodge and Cottages on Birch Bluff, where she later conducted town business as Newbury's Town Clerk and Tax Collector. The lodge later became a youth hostel for biking groups. The early 1990s found Violet working at the Newbury Information Booth welcoming visitors to the Lake Sunapee area. The mother of Elaine Vecino and Pamela Chalfant, Violet was seen as a strong, independent woman who could mow her hill and shovel snow off her roof well into her 90s.



The latest recipient is **Barbara Billings**, who turned 100 on May 7, 2022. Born in West Newfield, Maine, to Herbert and Gladys McLeod, she has lived in Newbury since 1986. Members of the Newbury Historical Society presented the cane to Mrs. Billings at her home on May 5. Mrs. Billings left home at the age of 16 and lived in the Boston area where she attended business machine school and later worked in the insurance industry. One of her favorite jobs was driving a school bus in rural Illinois for 11 years. She married Sanford M. Billings, Sr. when she was 19, and they were together for 71 years until his death in 2013. She has three children: Sanford Billings, Jr.

and his wife, Cathie; Kathryn Billings; and Mary Billings Lambert and her husband, John. In her younger days, Mrs. Billings was an avid gardener and played piano and organ at the Trinity Bible Church in Sutton for a number of years.

### Grammies Memories

**Florence Bly Perkins wrote down her memories in 1991. The following appears in the booklet pictured.**

#### "The Big Debate at Newbury Town Meeting"

*This took place in the 1920's after the State had notified the Town that they were going to plow the snow off the State Roads. The Old 103 went through South Newbury Village at that time; up until then all roads had been rolled and the snow packed down.*

*There were very few cars in town and horses were the main means of transportation.*

*As the farmers depended on winter income by selling lumber from their land to Fowler's Mill in Town or Trows Mill in Sunapee, a bare 103 and rolled roads to the farm presented quite a problem.*

*What were they supposed to do? Haul the logs to the Village by sled, unload and re-load on wheels?*

*Where could they find land to do this?*

*Who had lumber carts big enough to handle logs?*

*The debate got pretty hot by this time. The farmers didn't like the idea of plowing the snow off the road at all!*

*The meeting ended by having the Selectmen talk the matter out with the State Highway Department and other towns to see what they could come up with.*

*Not long after, the Town of Newbury bought a Chevy Truck with plow attachment and a year or so later a caterpillar tractor with the top speed of 10 miles per hour, and plowed all the town roads.*

*Soon the State hired the Town to plow 103 to the next town which proved to be quite a good income as the Town had to go to Mt. Sunapee and Bludgetts (sic) anyway over 103.*

Grammies Memories

by

Florence Bly Perkins





Newbury Historical Society  
P. O. Box 176  
Newbury, NH 03255

### Center Meeting House and Newbury Historical Society Programs for 2023

*June 19, 7:00 PM - **THE FORGOTTEN FOREST PRIMEVAL: Rediscovering Mount Sunapee's Old Growth.*** Following the airing of this documentary, filmmaker Ray Asselin will discuss how this project came to be.

*July 8, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM: **OLD HOME DAY OPEN HOUSE: People and Places in Old Newbury.*** Center Meeting House and the Newbury Historical Society.

*July 9, 10:00 AM - **CHURCH SERVICE*** with Pastor Cyndie D'Andrea of the South Newbury Union Church.

*July 30, 4:00 PM - **ANNUAL MEETING - POOR HOUSES AND TOWN FARMS: The Hard Row for Paupers.*** Steve Taylor, NH Humanities.

*August 7, 7:00 PM - **PAUPER ACTION*** - Mary Kronenwetter will discuss her historical novel about a young widow who, having no family to go back to when her husband dies, was forced to let herself be auctioned off to the lowest bidder at town meeting. The lowest bidder was paid by the town to support the person who then often performed what amounted to slave labor. Mary lives in The Dartmouth-Lake Sunapee region and has served as a museum educator at Historic Deerfield, the John Hay Estate at The Fells and the Enfield Shaker Museum.

*September 18, 7:00 PM - **PUTTING HUMAN FACES ON THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY: The Workers of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company.*** Robert B. Perreault, NH Humanities.

*October 2, 7:00 PM - **ALIEN ABDUCTION: Betty and Barney Hill.*** Elizabeth Slomba, UNH Archivist for the Hill Collection will discuss the University's collection of authentic UFO-related artifacts from Betty and Barney Hill, the couple who made the first well-documented and widely reported UFO abduction report in the United States.

*October 30, 7:00 PM - **CASE CLOSED ON THE 1873 SMUTTYNOSE AX MURDERS.*** J. Dennis Robinson, NH Humanities.

*November 19, 2:00 PM - **THANKS FOR GIVING - ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS: Land, Lake and Lore.*** The CMH will honor three women who are retiring from their service in the area: Debbie Stanley from Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust, June Fichter from Lake Sunapee Protective Association and Susan Warren from the John Hay Estate at The Fells.

*December 3, 5:00 PM - **TREE LIGHTING.***



