

Under the Hump

SOCIETY BUSINESS

NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Next Meeting:
May 21, 7 pm, CBMS

- Bring your own artifact to the meeting to either display and/or present at the meeting for all to enjoy.



Our Duxbury Historical Society will convene on Tuesday, May 21st, in the library at Crossett Brook Middle School at 7 pm. After our normal business meeting, the program will consist of an array of artifacts that depict our community's past. We welcome and hope that our members and guests will contribute to this showing with an artifact of their own for the evening. These can be displayed and/or explained how they all have contributed to our community's history. Since there is a lot of information and past out there, this will be a good opportunity to both exhibit your treasure and allow the public to view these attractions. We will allow time for fellowship and refreshments, so please come and enjoy the evening. If you have questions, call Donnie Welch, 244-7558.

DO YOU HAVE A PHOTO OF A PERSON OR PLACE WE CAN USE FOR A MYSTERY PHOTO? IF SO, PLEASE SUBMIT TO A NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE MEMBER TODAY! THANK YOU!

Last Issue's
Mystery Photo:
Carol Johnson Collins



Plant and Flower Sale

Our Duxbury Historical Society is once again holding a spring plant and flower fundraising sale for our members and friends. These plants will be supplied from Claussen's in Colchester.

All orders need to be completed and returned to us by May 15. Plants will be delivered during the week of May 20, and we will plan on delivery (or your pick up) on the same day.

Your options will consist of herbs, perennials and annuals of different colors, plus annual flats.

This will be a great chance to get your favorites conveniently and before Memorial Day while helping your local historical society. For price list, pictures, and questions please see or call Mame McKee at 802-793-7182, or Kelly at 244-5627, or Donnie at 244-7558.



SOCIETY BUSINESS

Archival/Preservation Committee Report

Members: Eulie Costello, Lori Morse, Bonnie Morse, Mark Morse

- Catalogued latest artifact donations & continue to review/update existing documents to ensure they are properly identified and stored.
- Family genealogy files for families whose last names begin with L, M, N, O, have been transcribed and placed in the archival files. Transcribing continues as time permits with a goal to have all families completed by 2020.
- We are always looking for Duxbury family photos to add to our collection. Please contact us and we can scan them in and return the original to you if you wish. Today's photo is tomorrow's history!

Donated Artifacts/Documents/Ephemera

[Bob Morse]

- Cemetery Inscription Manuals for all cemeteries in Duxbury, Waterbury, Moretown, Middlesex, and Worcester.
- Framed Photo of Mary (Stewart) Morse
- Framed Photo of Sawmill on Crossett Hill with employees
- Scrapbook of newspaper articles related to Duxbury & Waterbury families – compiled by Lonie Morse.
- 1858 Wallings Map of Washington County.

[Brian Lindner]

- 1911 *Report of Vermont RR Commissioners* and *Waterbury Record* article regarding an accident in Duxbury while moving a building which hit some wires and injured some workers slightly.

[Don Welch]

- Newspaper & Photo account of fatal vehicle accident at the Dowsville bridge in South Duxbury which occurred during the 1938 Hurricane.

Monetary Donations

James Hanley

*

Ben Smith

*

Bob Magee

*Call for Submissions!*

The newsletter committee is welcome to submissions and eager to hear from you! We would love for you to submit a story, poem, historical piece, photos, etc, that we could place in the newsletter for everyone to enjoy.

This is your newsletter—what would you like to see in it?

Do you have a story or poem about living in Duxbury or about a Duxbury resident who is special to you?

Did you write a poem or take photos when you made it to the top of Camel's Hump?

Do you have any historic photos of people, buildings, machinery, etc, that you would like to share?

These are just a few ideas—we welcome any and all submissions.

Please share your materials with a newsletter member (see names on back page) and we will place it in the next available issue.

Thank you in advance for your generosity!

P O T P O U R R I



Town Meeting 2019 – Thank You!

Our Duxbury Historical Society would like to thank all those involved with making the Town Meeting luncheon a success. This could not be done without the generous donations and effort by all. Our proceeds for the day totaled \$417. Town meetings would not be complete without the fellowship around these luncheons. Thank you all!

~Duxbury Historical Society Food Committee



Alison Magnani photos.

DAR Marking Graves of Two Revolutionary Soldiers in Duxbury

Skip Flanders is working with the local Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), to place markers on the graves of two revolutionary war soldiers buried in Graves Cemetery in North Duxbury. The two soldiers are Benjamin Davis and Samuel Ridley. Both men were early settlers in North Duxbury and were close neighbors.

Benjamin Davis was born in Newton, NH, in 1754 and was living in Moorestown (now Bradford, VT) at the time of the revolution. He served on a number of scouts from Bradford and went to the Battle of Saratoga in September 1777, serving from September 23 until October 27 and traveling 270 miles. Benjamin settled in Duxbury with his family in 1793 on the home site more recently Russell Davis - Howard Kennedy - Donald Chapman. Benjamin died in 1830.

Samuel Ridley was born in London, England, in 1752 and was pressed into service for the British Army. He deserted in spring of 1777 and enlisted in the third Maryland Regiment for three years. He was a corporal and at the end of his term of service he re-enlisted in the same command. He was taken prisoner at Gates defeat, wounded in the ankle at the battle of Camden, was in the battle of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth, NJ. He settled in Richmond and moved to Duxbury at the mouth of Ridley Brook after 1797. Samuel died in 1842 at 90 years old.

Application is being made to have the DAR conduct the ceremony and place markers on the graves of both Benjamin and Samuel to recognize their service to their country. The process takes about 6 months and we are hoping to schedule placement in October. The public is invited to attend. The descendants of Benjamin and Samuel are paying for the markers. Anyone who would like more information may contact Skip Flanders at wtbskip@comcast.net or call at 802-244-5529. We would especially like to hear from any descendants of Benjamin Davis or Samuel Ridley.

" THE THIRTY EIGHT "

By Skip Flanders

There are very few people today who can remember the September 1938 hurricane that hit New England including Vermont. This was before they gave hurricanes names and is simply referred to as "The Thirty Eight." This storm struck Long Island at about 2 pm on September 21 with sustained wind speeds of 120 mph. There was very little warning of the storm because the limited technology for weather forecasting. The storm moved northward at the speed of 47 mph up the Connecticut River.

The storm followed the path shown below and entered Vermont at 6:00 pm, reaching Burlington at about 8 pm and into Quebec at about 10 pm. The storm left a path of destruction with 650 people dead and \$308 million in damages which is the equivalent of \$5.1 billion in today's dollars. Four thousand five hundred houses and buildings were destroyed, 25,000 homes damaged, 26,000 cars destroyed, and 20,000 electric poles toppled. One of the largest resources destroyed was the forest with an estimated two billion trees destroyed.



Vermont farms suffered major loss of the corn harvest and almost complete loss of the apple crop being blown off the tree. There was great damage to sugar orchards because the leaves were still on the trees which were subject to the high winds. If the storm had occurred after the leaves had come off, the damage would have been far less. There was severe wind and water damage in Waterbury and Duxbury. In Waterbury the water flooded houses on Randall Street and the wind blew down many huge elms and maple trees on every street. Water was over the road on Winooski

Street at the GMP substation and washed out the road. The two-year-old 432 foot WDEV Radio tower was blown down during the storm.

In Duxbury the roads were damaged. The Scrabble Hill Road that leads to Camel's Hump was hardly recognizable. Work had begun on a new detour for the present.

There were seven deaths in Vermont attributed to the storm and one of those deaths occurred in South Duxbury. This article is about the death of Elliott J. Pirie of Barre, VT, by drowning in Dowsville Brook in South Duxbury on the evening of September 21, 1938. The information is taken from newspaper articles.

A party of seven men had eaten supper at the camp of James K. Pirie on the evening of September 21, 1938 after the hurricane had struck Vermont at 6 pm. The men were on their way home to Barre in two cars. The men had been informed that the road between Moretown and Waterbury was blocked. The men then decid-

Seven Dead

Seven are known to be dead as a direct result of Wednesday's storm. The list is as follows:

James Falvey, three, of North Adams, Mass., drowned at Pownal.

Kenneth Martin, 25, killed by a truck at Montpelier while engaged in storm clearance work.

Roger Miller, aged one, drowned at Brattleboro.

Elliot Pirie of Barre, presumably lost when a car in which he and three others sank in a section of washed out road near Moretown.

William Pouchen, Milford, N. H., drowned when his car was swept into the river at Simonsville.

Joseph Portulapi, 41, killed in fall when repairing storm damaged roof at Barre.

Leonard Whitbeck, 53, of Waban, Mass., fatally hurt when struck by falling tree at Bel-lows Falls.

“THE THIRTY EIGHT”



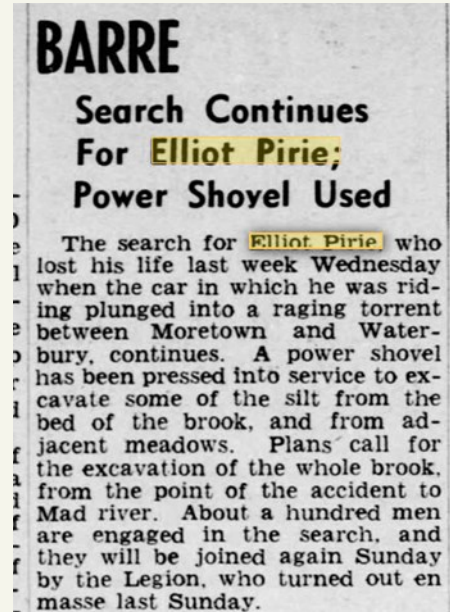
Elliott J. Pirie

ed to go over the so-called Hill Road to Waterbury. As the first car approached the Dowsville Brook bridge near the old Cemetery by the Alice and Eldon DeLong house, the water was over the bridge. The old covered bridge had been replaced by a new concrete bridge two years before.

On the other end of the bridge, the water appeared to be merely a surface puddle. The time was about 8:30 at night. The first car proceeded to cross the bridge. As the car reached the end of the bridge, it plunged into 10 feet of water where the water had washed out the road around the abutment. Three occupants were able to get out of the car and reach land: James Pirie (Elliott's father), Edwin Keast, and Charles Olliver. The missing man was Elliott J. Pirie. Some thought they heard Elliott call but did not know what he had said.



Washed out bridge at Dowsville with temporary bridge installed.



BARRE
Search Continues
For Elliott Pirie;
Power Shovel Used

The search for Elliott Pirie, who lost his life last week Wednesday when the car in which he was riding plunged into a raging torrent between Moretown and Waterbury, continues. A power shovel has been pressed into service to excavate some of the silt from the bed of the brook, and from adjacent meadows. Plans call for the excavation of the whole brook, from the point of the accident to Mad river. About a hundred men are engaged in the search, and they will be joined again Sunday by the Legion, who turned out en masse last Sunday.

The three men were injured but made their way to the home of a farmer who took them to Waterbury. They thought it possible that Elliott made his way back to the other side of the stream and went back to the second car which did not cross. The passengers in the second car were Frank Small, Waldron Shields, Harold Bancroft, and James Wilson. The passengers spent the night at the home of a farmer named Sterling and then returned to Barre the next afternoon unaware of the accident.

When it was learned that Elliott was not with them, a search was started at the scene for him. His body was not immediately found.

The search for the body of Elliott began immediately but to no avail. There were many volunteers in the

The new bridge at Dowsville Brook after the 1938 hurricane where Elliott J. Pirie drowned.

" THE THIRTY EIGHT "

search including members of the American Legion from Waterbury and Stowe, and Barre firemen searched the river with grapple hooks.

During the searches they found many of Elliott's clothes including his pants with his watch in the pocket which stopped at 8:40. All of his clothing was found except for one shoe.

On October 10, a power shovel was brought in to excavate the Dowsville Brook from the point of the accident to the Mad River. One hundred volunteers assisted in the search. No body was found.

On October 21, a memorial service was held for Elliott J. Pirie in Barre with 400 family and friends in attendance. His death certificate was signed by Howard Kennedy with cause of death likely drowning and body unrecovered. Elliott was 38 years old and worked as the foreman at his father's granite quarry in Barre (now the Rock of Ages Quarry). His death left a wife and three children ages 15, 13, and 7.

On May 29, 1939, Elliott's body was discovered about a mile downstream from the bridge where the accident occurred. His body was buried in the sand about 30 feet from the bed of the stream. His body was discovered by Henry Wehner, an employee of Arthur Coffrin of the Moretown-Waitsfield Road.

A committal service was held on Memorial Day for Elliott J. Pirie in Barre with burial in Elmwood Cemetery. This ended one of the most intensive searches for a body in this vicinity.

Elliott J. Pirie's Body Found; Hurricane Victim Buried In Sand Mile From Spot Where Auto Struck Hole

(Special to the Free Press)

BARRE, May 29.—The body of Elliott J. Pirie of Hill street, Barre, who lost his life in the hurricane last September, was found this morning buried under sand about 30 feet from the course of the stream and about a mile downstream from the hole into which his car plunged last September 21.

The body was found by Henry Wehner, an employe of Arthur Coffrin of the Moretown-Waitsfield road, who was cutting brush on lowland bordering the creek when he discovered the body. Information was relayed to the family of the deceased in Barre, and James G. Pirie, Elliott's father, Fred Pirie, an uncle, and Leon Craig, a cousin, left immediately for the scene and identified the body.

Recovery of the body brings to end one of the most intensive searches ever made in this vicinity. Large searching parties covered the district thoroughly all last fall, and a power shovel was used to dig up most of the bed of the stream, all to no avail. Shovel marks of the searching party were still visible in the ground near the spot where the body was found, indicating that the searchers barely missed the spot.

Memorial Service

Funeral of Elliott J. Pirie

(Special to the Free Press)

BARRE, May 31.—Impressive committal services were held Memorial Day at the graveside in Elmwood cemetery for Elliott J. Pirie, who lost his life during the flood and hurricane last September.

The body was escorted to the Elmwood cemetery by a delegation of members from Barre Post, No. 10, American Legion, and Summit Lodge, No. 104, F. & A. M., of Williamstown. Services at the graveside were conducted by Warren Covell, master of Summit Lodge, using the Masonic ritual. A salute was fired by a squad from Company M, 172nd Infantry, Vermont National Guard, followed by taps and the roll of the drums by members of the Barre Drum and Bugle Corps. Benediction was given by the Rev. L. G. Williams, pastor of the Barre Universalist Church.

There was a large gathering of friends and relatives at the services, including a delegation from the quarries, where the deceased worked most of his life.

WANDA JOHNSON

The following article is reprinted with permission from *The Montpelier Bridge*, www.montpelierbridge.com.
The Duxbury Historical Society thanks Mike Dunphy, Editor-in-Chief, and Tom Brown, Managing Editor, for granting permission.

From Egypt to Vermont Wanda Johnson's Transoceanic Love Story

By Tom Brown

The story of 104-year-old Wanda Fortunée Meriems Johnson, who lives in Duxbury, reads like a Hollywood love story—think *Titanic* without the iceberg.

It began 80 years ago in Heliopolis, Egypt, when Wanda decided to join a group of young people bound for the 1939 New York World's Fair. Her parents, Jews whose family fled persecution in Europe, were reluctant to let her go, especially with Hitler's storm clouds closing over Europe. She convinced them, however, and the fair was spectacular, including the debut of a new-fangled device called "television," which enthralled the fair's 44 million visitors. But it was the return voyage that changed her life forever and led her to Vermont.

Four days before the ship docked in Alexandria, Egypt, Wanda met Robert Lincoln Johnson, an intellectual New Englander who was headed to Beirut to teach philosophy, psychology, and sociology in the American University there. Before they disembarked Bob proposed to the rather independent Wanda, her second proposal of the trip. She turned down both suitors but agreed to correspond with Bob in the proper courting style of the day.

"We wrote letters to each other on a daily basis, long letters telling all these thoughts and feelings," she recalled in a firm, accented voice. "After two years of writing each other, the Americans were going to enter the war, and young men were asked to go back to United States and, of course, by that time, I believed he was the kind of person I would want to marry."

The couple eloped, marrying at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, and after returning to New York, the newlyweds settled on a farm in southern Vermont.

From Heliopolis to Duxbury

The journey of a Jewish girl from Egypt to Duxbury, Vermont, serves as a reminder of the evils of racist pogroms from the 19th century to Hitler's rise, and at the same time, highlights the opportunities and freedom represented by migration to America.

Wanda's parents, an Italian-speaking Austrian mother and Russian-Romanian father, left Austria around 1895 when anti-Jewish sentiment started to rise. They settled in Russia, but once again hatred made life untenable. They emigrated to Turkey before settling in Heliopolis, now a part of sprawling Cairo.

Wanda was educated in Egypt's French schools, where her love affair for that language led to an 18-year career teaching French in Vermont and Massachusetts. But knowing English was the key to finding work in 1930s Egypt, so she attended the American University in Cairo. "I had to learn English to be a typist," she said. "I worked for an English company as a secretary for a cigarette factory." She later worked for Warner Brothers Studios in Cairo, where her knowledge of French, English, Italian, Arabic, and Hebrew was invaluable.

After leaving Egypt in 1941, the couple owned farms in West Townsend and Grafton before settling on a 550-acre farm in West Brattleboro, where they raised 10,000 chickens, 350 sheep, and

three children: Colman "Cordy" Johnson, Robert L. "Bobby" Johnson Jr., and Carol "Curley" Johnson Collins.

Wanda is quick to admit that farming was not her thing, and two brain hemorrhages suffered by young Cordy kept her occupied. But as soon as the kids were old enough, she went back to her love of French. While teaching in Brattleboro she earned an undergraduate degree from Keene State College in New Hampshire and a master's from Smith College in Massachusetts.

Un Amour des Livres

With the children heading off to college, farming became unsustainable for Bob, who relied on their labor. He recognized the rise of industrial chicken farms in the Midwest, and knew he couldn't compete. Seeking to combine their mutual interests the couple found an ad for a bookstore in the heart of Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in 1965 Bob launched The BookCase—a 28-year fixture selling used books to future lawyers, doctors, and dreamers, while Wanda taught French in Boston regional high schools.

In 1993, Harvard University refused to renew the lease for The BookCase store, which was already costing \$7,000 a month. Then 80, and having suffered a recent fall, Bob needed to retire and return to the rural sanctity of Vermont, where their children still lived. Wanda couldn't completely divest, however, and kept 3,000 of her beloved French language books, eventually donating 1,000 to Keene State.

"I like the French books," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "And I like to have a library of French literature. It was a very strong part of my life."

Fortunately for the couple, their son-in-law, Fred Collins, is a master woodworker who designed, and with the family, built a beautiful round house for them across the road from Fred and Carol's place in South Duxbury, where they could enjoy their six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Bob passed away in 1995 at age 82.

At 104, Wanda still lives in the house and is helped daily by Carol, Fred, Cordy, Carol's son Seth, and other caregivers. She is grateful for Meals on Wheels, although the food doesn't always suit her, she says. Three local folks—Pam Perry, Sharon Turner, and Suzy Markowitt—are a big help to Carol with her daily care.

Wanda isn't sure about the secret to her longevity. She said she used to smoke but stopped when the dangers became more well-known, "thanks to my daughter."

"Maybe this is why I have lived so long," she said while holding her mezuzah. "I held this, every night before I went to sleep, and I thanked God!" The mezuzah is often found in the doorways of Jewish homes and contains bits of parchment with verses from the Torah.

Whatever the reason, Wanda Fortunée Meriems Johnson has lived a long and meaningful love story worthy of *Titanic's* Jack and Rose.

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D U X B U R Y H I S T O R I C A L S O C I E T Y , I N C .
C O N T A C T I N F O R M A T I O N

President: Don Welch

Phone: 802-244-7558

E-mail: dmwelch136@yahoo.com

Vice President: Christian Magnani

Phone: 802-244-1915

E-mail: c.magnani@outlook.com

Treasurer: Mark Morse

Phone: 802-244-7080

E-mail: markmorsevt@myfairpoint.net

Secretary: Laura Titus

Phone: 802-496-6328

E-mail: lauratitus3030@yahoo.com

General Questions

Don Welch, President
318 Main St.
Duxbury, VT 05676

Newsletter

Kelly Welch

Phone: 802-244-5627

E-mail: welchkelly2014@yahoo.com

Alison Magnani

Phone: 802-244-1915

E-mail: a.magnani@outlook.com

Skip Flanders

Phone: 802-244-5529

E-mail: wtbskip@comcast.net

If you have any comments or contributions for the newsletter we would love to hear from you.

Membership

Mark Morse, Treasurer
804 VT Route 100
South Duxbury, VT 05660

Webmaster

Ken Spencer

Phone: 802-244-5680

E-mail: kenspencer197@gmail.com

www.DuxburyVT.com

**DON'T FORGET THE NEXT MEETING - MAY 21
CROSSETT BROOK MIDDLE SCHOOL - 7 PM**

D U X B U R Y H I S T O R I C A L
S O C I E T Y , I N C .
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