



Waitsfield Telecom

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Reba Hall

Reba Hall had just lost an important sale. Gussie Graves had recently hired Reba to help her in the new real estate business she had opened on Rte 17 in Fayston. Reba was her first employee. With help in the office, Gussie could afford now to take a little time off, and so she went on a much-needed vacation.

Still, Gussie felt she should check in to see how business was doing. A customer seemed near to buying some property and Gussie was anxious to know that Reba had closed the sale. "Sorry," Reba reported. The sale had gone south. But Reba explained cheerfully that this was really for the best. "I never liked those people anyway," she said. Reba promised that she would make up for the loss someday and sell the property to a better customer.

Reba was someone who came into the office on bitterly cold Saturdays, "because it was just as easy to stay warm while working." She brought the same frank interest and zeal into a favorite hobby of hers as well - the informal study of her adopted home town of Fayston, Vermont.

She spent her childhood on a farm in Lowell, Vermont, though she and her family would later move to Montpelier. After studying at the University of Vermont, she married her husband Alexander, a Scotsman "who could turn his accent on and off like a faucet, because he knew that immigrants were sometimes better off not being immigrants."

In time, she and Alex settled in Center Fayston, in the shadow of the Sam Strong farm. It was then that the town would inherit one of its most dedicated historians. From the time she arrived, Reba took an intense interest in what was happening in town and what occurred in the past. She was an enthusiastic researcher, letter writer and scribe and was always eager to share her enthusiasm with others.



*Reba Hall milking, Lowell, Vermont
around 1918.*



Reba Hall

Reba survives her husband Alex and still lives in their house with a million-dollar view down to the valley below. Though unable to get around very easily anymore, she still tells stories of the past that take the listener with her on long journeys about town. She is a Fayston treasure.

This little account of her hometown, Fayston Vermont is written with Reba's help and inspiration.

Fayston

The Chronicle of a Mountain Community

“Ah, ‘twas the task for men of brawn,
To hew the stately forest down,
To build new homes, the streets, the town,
Their tasks begun at early morn”

So wrote Laura Brigham Boyce over 100 years ago in *Centennial Ode*, her poetic tribute to those settlers of Fayston who had cleared the unbroken wilderness and paved the way for their descendents. In 1798, the community of which she wrote was throwing itself a 100th birthday party.

On a crisp fall day, September 16th to be exact, in a gala event held on the Bragg Hill farm of J. B. Thompson, the townspeople were celebrating their past. There was reason to be celebrating for sure, for their ancestors had struggled hard to make the town what it was. Yet sadly, the town was, at that very moment, loosing many of its citizens to the American migration west. Many Faystonites were choosing to try their fortunes in a new America, just opening up to settlement. They were dreaming of a prosperity that remained difficult to achieve in these Green Mountains.

But some did remain, and in them, the fiery spirit of the original settlers continued to burn. The mountains, harsh climate and remoteness of Fayston seemed indeed to feed the spirit of its people. And as we shall see, these same woods and mountains gave fuel to the eventual salvation and redevelopment of the town in the century to come.

Lets begin our look at the story of Fayston at a recent meeting held here in the town hall.

As the winter of 2000 drew to a close, a group of individuals was assembled to help make plans for a large parcel of state-owned land in Fayston. This group, composed of residents and non-residents alike, was named to assist the State of Vermont in its designs for the future of the 2700 acre “Phen Basin Block” of Camel’s Hump State Forest. The whole process arose after the Agency of Natural Resources, in an attempt to put an end to the use of mountain bikes on the land, dug giant trenches and dropped numerous trees along the bike trails. Public outcry was loud and clear, and the State quickly admitted wrongdoing. The Phen Basin Advisory Board was formed shortly afterwards and the interests of recreational users, conservationists and concerned citizens would be heard.

But why mention this in a “history” of the town? Because, in a way, this story illustrates remarkably well the changing dynamics of Fayston’s development. The chronicle of this town is inseparable from the nature of its landscape. In the beginning, the challenge was to open up the mountains and forest to pave the way to growth; today, the challenge is to protect the same mountains and forest as we grow.

Of equal significance is the cast of characters. As the town of Fayston grows into the next century, its evolution, like that of many Vermont towns, is molded in part by the hands of a population not living within its boundary. This was not always so.

When Vermont was still in early bloom, the “wilderness” was up for grabs. Land “speculators” or proprietors were acquiring grants for the development of townships. Land was given or sold to eager settlers, whose mere presence in the wilderness provided opportunity for commerce and trade and supplied the manpower for common defense. In the heart of the Green Mountains, away from any major trade routes, sat a piece of unclaimed land that was rocky, mountainous and of apparent interest to a man named Walbridge.

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The Early Years

Fayston was born on February 2nd, 1782, when, with a sweep of his pen, Governor Thomas Chittenden signed a charter establishing a township, approximately six square miles, to Ebenezer Walbridge and his “associates”. This signing occurred a mere two days after a similar charter established the neighboring town of Waitsfield. Though the charter was signed in 1782, an official town governing body would not be formed for another 23 years.

In keeping with public policy of populating land for both commerce and defense, the charter clearly intended that the land be cleared and settled: “Each proprietor... shall plant and cultivate two acres of land and build a house at least eighteen feet square on the floor or have one family settled on each share of the land in said township.” If proprietors failed to live up to this agreement “within the time limited by law”, the land would “revert to the freemen of this state in order to be regranted.” The wording of the charter couldn’t be any clearer, but there is no record of any lots actually reverting to the state; in fact many of the proprietors never even saw the land they owned.

Who Put the “Fay” in Fayston?

Adding his signature to the original charter was Joseph Fay, then Secretary of the Governor’s Council. Joseph was the son of “Landlord” Stephen Fay of Bennington. The Bennington Fays were well known and figured prominently in the early history Vermont - Stephen Fay was proprietor of the Catamount Tavern, headquarters of the Green Mountain Boys.

Joseph himself was a soldier in the Battle of Bennington. The family connection to this key battle may have come to play later on in the naming of Stark Mountain after Gen. John Stark, hero of the Bennington skirmish. The younger Fay later joined Ethan and Heman Allen in representing the Republic of Vermont before the Continental Congress and later the United States Congress; their mission was to convince those bodies to admit Vermont to the Union.

Though Fayston's was not the only charter to bear Joseph's signature, it was decided to use this opportunity to memorialize the family name. It seems, however, that any connection with the town ended with his signature on the charter - Joseph Fay never became a landowner in the town that bore his name.

Though the charter is dated 1782, it would be another seven years before the land was actually settled. It was in 1789 that Lynde Wait built the first house on the height of land we now know as Bragg Hill.

The Wilderness is Settled

When Wait came up the hill in 1798, he cemented an early relationship between Fayston and the neighboring town of Waitsfield. Lynde married a young lady who shared his same surname, Lucia Wait. Lucia was the daughter of Gen. Benjamin Wait, a soldier in the French and Indian War and Brigadier General in the American Revolution. The general was also an original grantee in the town that bore his name and eventually went on to own half the acreage in Waitsfield.

The Waitsfield connection was indeed a strong one. In fact, many people in Waitsfield seemed to think it would be just dandy if the land to the west were to become part of their town. In 1804, Waitsfield voted to ask the proprietors of Fayston to join them in petitioning the General Assembly for annexation. But the movement fizzled. Faystonites, it seemed, were not so enthusiastic, and in 1805 the settlement officially organized as a town of its own. Lynde Wait was elected selectman along with Rufus Barrett and William Williams. James Wait was to become first town clerk.

As was customary in those days, the young Farr was granted a piece of land, his reward for being the first-born male child in town. This event later caused town historian Laura Brigham Boyce to fume.

The first child to be born in town arrived in 1801, when Lois Wait gave birth to a little girl named Lucia. A short time later, Thomas G. Wait Farr was born, the son of William Farr. As was customary in those days, the young Farr was granted a piece of land, his reward for being the first-born male child in town. This event later caused town historian Laura Brigham Boyce to fume.

In spite of the fact that she wrote it in the late 1800s, Boyce's account of these first children, and the fact that it was the infant Farr who received the land, demonstrates a remarkably "modern" perspective. Boyce observed: "*Farr...was born and received a lot of land, as being the first male child born in town. From which we see, in those primitive days, the weaker were oppressed by the stronger, as they still are. There is no reason why Lucia Wait should not have had that lot of land as her birthright - except that she wasn't a boy.*"

About ten years after the Waits settled Bragg Hill, two men from New Hampshire, William and Paul Boyce, broke a clearing on land about three and one half miles to the north. They were joining their uncle, Nathan Boyce who had settled in these woods on the advice of their family friend, Joseph Marble. Marble had already arrived here and was quite content. He wrote back with great praise for the area.

The Boyces came and cleared land on the north side of the ridge that separates the northern and southern halves of town. Their land also bordered Shepard Brook, a river so named for a hunter who trapped beaver along its banks. The brook waters ran downstream to eventually flow past Marble's homestead. Now that this section of town was settled, the pattern of two distinct population centers in town was underway. "North Fayston" was to experience a flurry of building activity, and trees were soon dropping to make way for homes and farms.

Though logs were plentiful, sawed wood was not. Thus most buildings were of log design and a house-building party was called a "log rolling". Of the simple structure that her grandfather built as a home, Laura Boyce wrote, "*There was no board in all the cabin, save one ... Grandfather bored holes in the side of the cabin, drove in some wooden pegs, laid the precious board across and there was her cupboard, and I suspect that it may also have served as a table.*"

Pioneering was indeed rough, and it seems that William Boyce, once settled, soon longed for the companionship of a lady. It is also likely that he longed for a little help around the place. To settle things, William returned to New Hampshire to fetch his love, Irene. Though William may have loved Irene, it seems Irene did not love the idea of moving to Fayston, so Irene stayed put. She seems to have had some doubt about the chances of success along Shepard Brook when she wrote the following farewell, "William, I wish thee well. I hope the Lord will bless thee, but I know He won't."

And at day's end, though tired from the backbreaking work, they eagerly found the energy to join Mr. Marble for a dance in his old kitchen. And a lively dance it was!

In spite of the hard life (or maybe due to the hard life), these early Faystonites knew how to have fun. When neighbors helped Joseph Marble build his new house, they held a log rolling. And at day's end, though tired from the backbreaking work, they eagerly found the energy to join Mr. Marble for a dance in his old kitchen. And a lively dance it was! Hopping and twirling to the strains of "*Oh, Be Joyful!*" on the corn stalk fiddle, the revelers assured Marble that a new house was a wise investment, when their joyful dancing caused the kitchen floor to fall in.

Town officials, meanwhile, were taking their civic responsibilities seriously as evidenced by a string of developments in the years immediately following the first elections. In 1807 the first highway survey was conducted and a tax was levied, five cents per dollar, "to be worked out on the highway."

It would be three years before a tax, to be paid "in grain or flax", was levied when a duty of 1.5 cents on the dollar was instituted to cover the cost of schooling. It was in 1809 that the voters met to address the education of their young and to begin the process of formal education. By 1860, there would be ten school districts in town, but in the early years only two were created: District No. 1 being all the land south of Shepard Brook, and District No. 2 being the lands to the north.

Fayston Educates Its Youth, The First 100 Years.

Up until 1809, the young people in town were educated in their own homes. On October 29, 1810, the selectmen warned the first school meeting and members of the first school board were chosen. Rufus Barrett, Lynde Wait and Joseph Wilder were elected to the board and Leonard Brigham was chosen "collector". The following month, the voters met in Lynde Wait's house and decided to try to build a school building and "set it a few rods southeast of Lynde Wait's dwelling." Assessments were levied on residents and \$175.00 was set aside for the project. In December, the bid offer of Thomas L. Youngs was accepted; the town would pay Young's \$159.75 to build an 18 by 22 foot building. They gave him until the next July to get it done.

It wasn't until the following November, however, that the actual school calendar was established. It was decided then to hold a three-month school year during the winter months

(when children's help in the fields was less needed). Voters at that meeting also expressed their displeasure in Thomas Youngs' workmanship when they resolved not to accept his work until it was "*dun according to contract*". Finally in 1812, after three years of planning, ten families sent 25 students to the new school and the town's system of public education was underway.

Mobile Classrooms and Teachers at the Breakfast Table

This first schoolhouse had hardly settled on its foundation when, in 1826, it was moved down the road. During the move the building was outfitted with a stove to replace the old, inefficient fireplace. Five years later, it was moved again and there it sat for ten years. In 1841 there was a need for more space and the original building was not worth renovating. A new structure was built on the site, one nearly twice as large, costing the taxpayers \$229.08. And what of the little old schoolhouse? Well it was moved again, of course. This time it was sold to the highest bidder and was converted into a residence.

I must have seemed expeditious to move schoolhouses to accommodate the needs of students; moving a school was a somewhat common occurrence. The photo below shows a "moving bee", men and cattle haul the No. 3 school building down the road while the children and young folk gather to watch. The No. 3 school was situated near the intersection of Kew-Vasseur and Center Fayston Roads.

In the 1800s, as is the case today, school costs were a hot topic and schooling was not inexpensive. In the years between 1811 and 1819, the tax for schools ranged between 1.5 and 3 cents on the dollar. In 1819 the tax was settled at 2 cents, "to be paid in wheat". A family was also counted upon to contribute 2/3rds of a cord of wood for each pupil it sent to the school. Additionally, it was expected that the residents would each board the schoolteacher for a period relative to the number of pupils they sent.

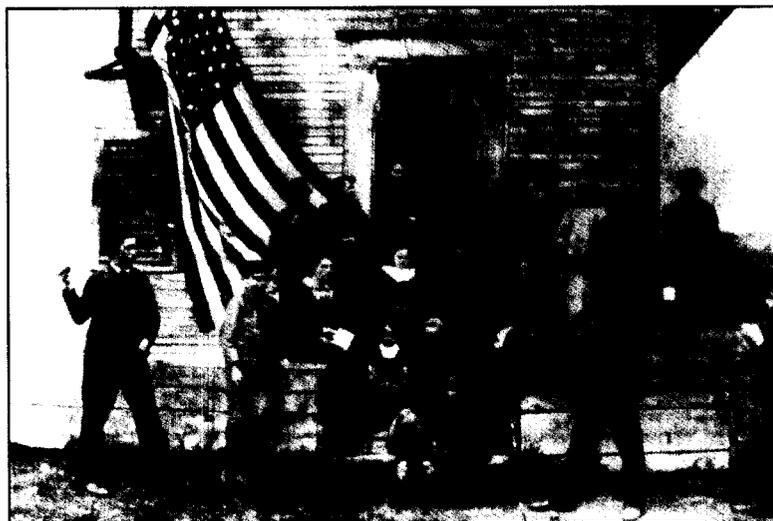


Moving the No. 3 School, corner of Center Fayston and Kew-Vasseur Roads. (Courtesy Fayston Historical Society)

There is little record of just how the students felt about having the schoolmaster sleeping in the next room, but there are indications that these teachers were often highly esteemed - if not highly paid - members of the community. Such a man was Willard B. Porter who, in the mid 1800s, served the town not only as school teacher, but was also school superintendent, town clerk, justice of the peace, and a "Christian gentleman".

There existed in those days a strong relationship between education and moral training; both were both tightly woven into the fabric of the community. Moral upbringing was a community affair, and religious services were often held in the schools on the Sabbath.

The official responsibilities of education lay in the hands of the many school districts eventually being organized in town. Each district was charged with establishing its own schoolhouse and was responsible for collecting school taxes. Throughout the 19th century,



No. 2 School – Fall Term 1905. (Courtesy Fayston Historical Society)

the number of school districts increased with the growing population. That the town was growing tremendously is reflected in the school census of 1844 when 263 students were being educated in the Fayston schools.

F.W. Beer's *Atlas of Washington County* shows the existence of nine individual school districts as of 1873. Though these districts were distinct political precincts, their boundaries were occasionally altered to accommodate shifting populations. Such was the case in 1843 when North Fayston alone was divided into two new school districts.

North Fayston

In 1843, the one school district previously covering the land north of Shepard Brook was divided into school district No. 4 to the east and No. 2 to the west. And as the districts grew, so did the community of North Fayston – the closest Fayston ever came to having its own village.

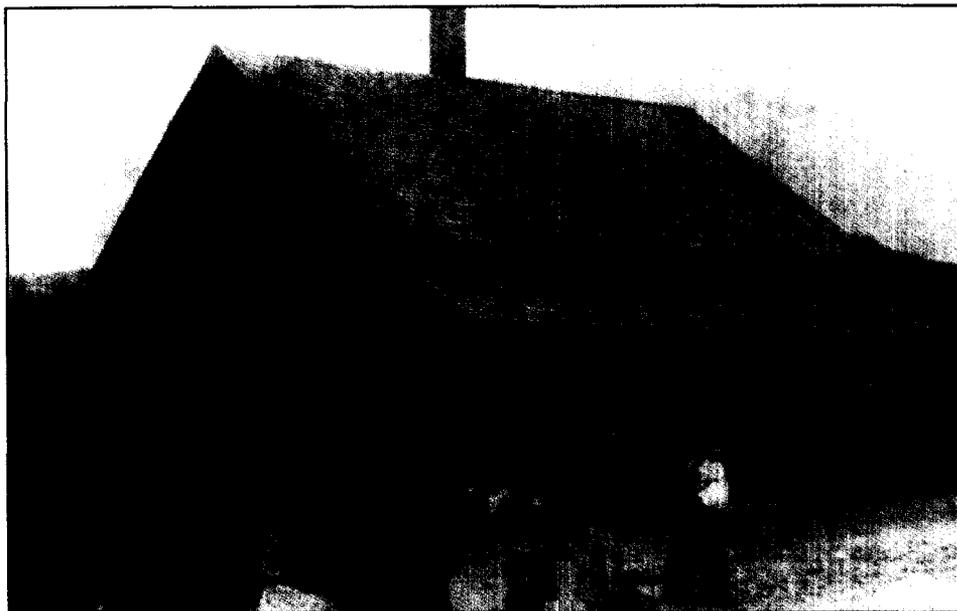
Shepard Brook was a significant source of power, and along its banks lumber mills were built, turning out, among other things, building products useful for further development. Flat lumber coming out of the mills improved construction techniques. New “plank” houses could be built more easily, and at lower cost than the traditional log houses. Clapboard and shingle mills provided similar building advances. As this industry grew, so did the concentration of people living in North Fayston. In fact, by 1879, growth in the area prompted the people of North Fayston to open a post office, just to the west of the No. 4 school. It would be the only one the town would know. (Visitors to today's town hall can see the original post office boxes, which thankfully have been saved and given to the people in town, a gift from Virginia Perkins.)



School No. 2, January 2001.
(Photo by Rick Haynes)



*This February, 2001 photo is at the former No. 4 School
as seen from the North Fayston Cemetary.*
(Photo by Rick Haynes)



*Home of the North Fayston post office, late 1800s.
(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)*

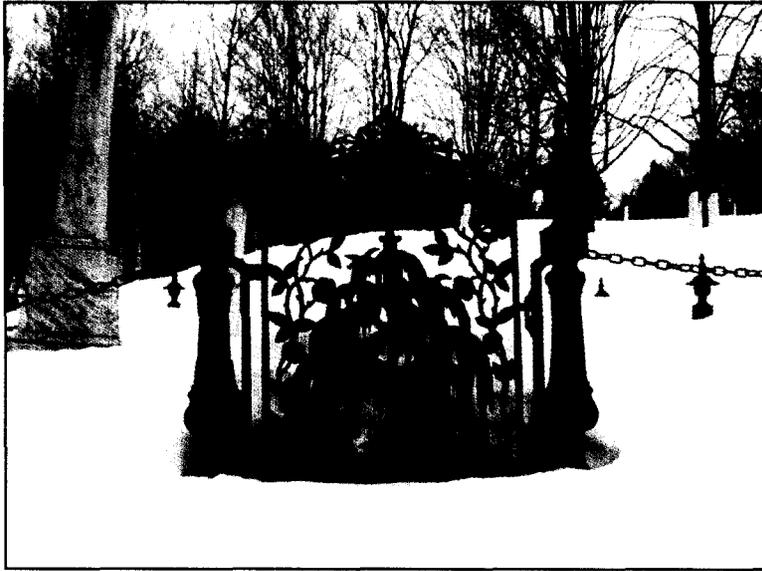
Across the road from No. 4 school, the town dedicated land to burying and honoring its dead; the North Fayston cemetery would become the largest of the three in town. Among those remembered there are members of the Folsom family, who arrived in Fayston from Tunbridge Vermont in the mid-1800s.

The “Folsom Gate”

Mary Folsom, daughter of John Folsom, was well educated and a distinguished scholar, fluent in several languages. One story holds that her reputation reached the ears of U.S. Senator William Dillingham of Waterbury. Wanting and able to afford the very best for his children, he hired Mary to be their personal tutor and brought her down to Washington. But he became concerned for Mary’s safety when he heard of the attack on Fort Sumter and sent her back to Vermont to live. Mary died in 1910 and was buried along with other members of her family in the Folsom plot. Surrounding the gravesite where Mary and other family members are buried is an iron chain fence and a most beautiful gate.

Trudy Folsom, descendant of the original settlers, wrote an account story of the family resting-place and interesting gate. The Folsom family was of humble means. Why would they have erected such an elaborate gate in a cemetery otherwise adorned with simple stones? Curious, Trudy set out to find out more.

A visit to Tunbridge’s East Hill Cemetery, where earlier Folsoms were laid to rest, uncovered similar gates of the same ornate design. It may have been the unexpected loss of a son, who was away in Michigan, which inspired this poor family to spend precious money in this memorial. Daniel Folsom was only 24 years old when he died, apparently of heart problems. The inscription on his stone reads “Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh.” His family may have chosen to remember him further with a special entrance to his final resting-place.



*The "Folsom Gate", North Fayston Cemetery.
(Photo by Rick Haynes)*

Another memorial of sorts is readily visible to modern travelers riding (or biking) up North Fayston Road. One does not even have to leave the car to see the cement water trough along the side of the road, just past the Boyce Road intersection. There, Clara D. Miller installed a spring-fed watering trough and donated it to the town. By all accounts, it seems she simply wanted it to be a perpetual memorial to her sisters, two of which grew up with Clara on Sharpshooters Road. It is still used occasionally as a water source for people who pass by, but because the water is not regularly tested, it should be used accordingly.

Sharpshooter Road.

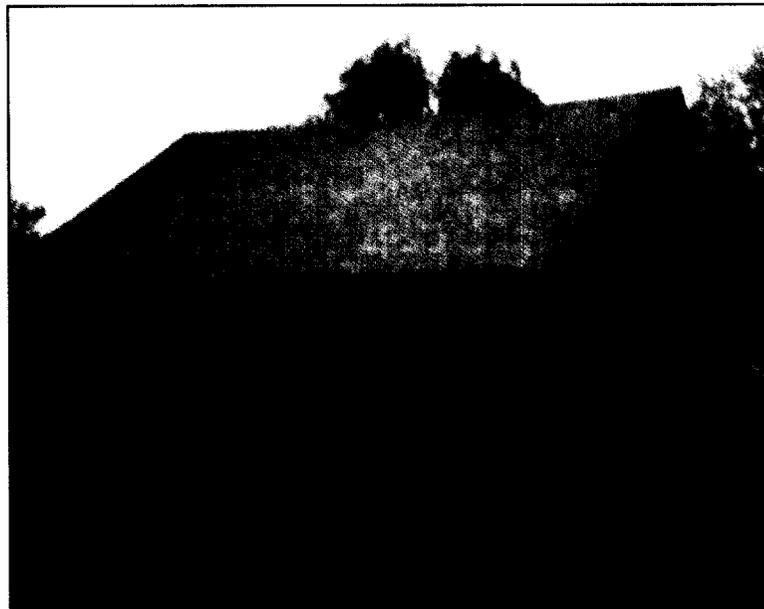
The road called Sharpshooter, quiet and little traveled today, was once along the main route over the hills of Duxbury and on to the railroad in Waterbury. The name of this road is reason enough to pause here and ask "why Sharpshooter?" One theory regularly pops up. Reba Hall thinks it arose from the fact that the hunting here was good and that there were a number of hunters in the area who considered themselves pretty good shots. Robert Vasseur agrees, adding that many hunting camps, with such names as "Rapid Fire" were built along this road to access the good hunting. Then again, we might question the marksmanship of these hunters when we hear Robert mention the name of yet another camp - "Cease Fire!"

Sam Strong and "Baird the Bush".

In between major settlements in the north and south ends of town was land Sam Strong was to call his own. "Center" Fayston was not really a town center - Center Fayston was just "in between". But this suited Sam Strong just fine, and he began cultivating the land in the mid-1820s, eventually farming about 200 acres. Although the original farmhouse is gone, the large barn that remains on Strong Road was originally on the "Baird the Bush" property, some miles distant.

There are few documented facts to back up the colorful tales of the Bairds and how their homestead came to be called “Baird in the Bush” or, more commonly, “Baird the Bush.” so we must consider these stories with some reservation. We hear today how this quiet, somewhat recluse clan, would spend long periods in the woods, or “bush” with little outside contact. Story is, the family would occasionally be seen emerging from the woods above Stagecoach Road, riding a wagon on their way to church. All dressed up, black bonnets tied down against the wind, it is if they were trying to show the world that they were indeed alive and well.

Baird was an independent sort and was not going to budge – at least not easily. It seems Baird was not going anywhere without his barn.



*The Baird the Bush barn, moved to the Sam Strong farm in Center Fayston.
(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)*

It was through his father’s later marriage to a Baird that Sam Strong acquired the large barn that remains to this day. When old Mr. Baird’s wife passed away, the Strongs felt it would be best if Mr. Baird didn’t continue to live alone. But Baird was an independent sort and was not going to budge – at least not easily. It seems Baird was not going anywhere without his barn. The Strongs must have felt up to this challenge, and so took on the task of moving Baird, along with his barn, the six hilly miles to the Strong farm.

Life and Religion - Fayston Worships

When the town was very young, it was common for residents to travel to neighboring towns to worship; those living in South Fayston would attend service in Waitsfield, those in North Fayston would attend in Moretown. In time that would change and there was a period in its history that Fayston supported its own congregations. In 1821, citizens formed the Fayston Unity Society “for the purpose of supporting and settling” a minister. The Unity Society selected Jotham Carpenter as its first minister and gave him a parcel of land.

Religion was integral to the life of early residents and the position of minister, like schoolmaster, was held in high regard. For this reason, congregations did whatever they could to support their minister. As part of their compensation, it was common in those days to give the minister a piece of land. For one, land was more plentiful than money. We might also suppose that such a gift might help ensure that the parson stuck around.

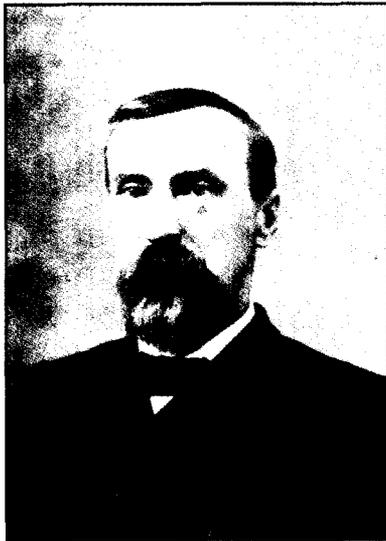
In 1838, both the Protestant Methodists and the Congregational Society organized. The Congregationalists actually hoped to erect a meetinghouse, though their meetings were eventually held in the No. 3 school. The practice of holding religious meetings in the schools continued. Records indicate that in the mid-1800s, the Reformed Presbyterian Society would occasionally host preachers in both schoolhouses No.3 and No.1.

The final chapter in the growth of religious organizations seems to have occurred when, in 1870, the Freewill Baptist church was formed. It was a small congregation with 15 practicing members.

As the century closed, however, the ability of Fayston to support its own churches dwindled and, like its post office, these institutions were eventually dissolved, largely through unions with like congregations in Moretown and Waitsfield.

The Irish Connection

That the population did not fall even more dramatically during the last half of the 18th century was due in large part to the many immigrants who arrived from Ireland. Their movement to the New World was fueled by the Great Potato Famine of 1845 –1849, an event that left Ireland reeling, both economically and socially. The immigrants from Ireland were country folk used to subsistence farming and knew how to earn a livelihood from working the soil. This area provided such a life, and by 1860, one in three families in town were of Irish descent. And in 1860, just under 20,000 bushels of potatoes were pulled from Fayston soil.



John B. Thompson.
(Photo from "The Early Years,
Fayston Centennial Celebration")

Among the Irish who settled were Samuel and Richard Strong, John Long, Henry and Robert Kew, Patrick Smith and John B. Thompson. Thompson would become a local teacher, superintendent of schools and Vermont state representative. He settled and cultivated the same land that Leon and Emma Vasseur would farm 130 years later. Most of the Irish were simple country farmers who arrived with tremendous determination, but little wealth. Yet there were a few exceptions - like John Browne.

Born in Ireland in 1816 of English descent, John Pyne Browne came to America in 1851 where he married and made his way to Fayston. Unlike many of his fellow countrymen Browne's background was more patrician than rugged. In addition to being the grandson of the Earl of Waterpark, England, he was the nephew of the immensely popular English poet, Felicia Browne Hemans. Browne himself went on to study at Trinity College in Dublin before venturing overseas. In Fayston, he shared his talents with his fellow townsmen by becoming an active participant in town affairs, holding numerous public offices.

The McLaughlin Farm

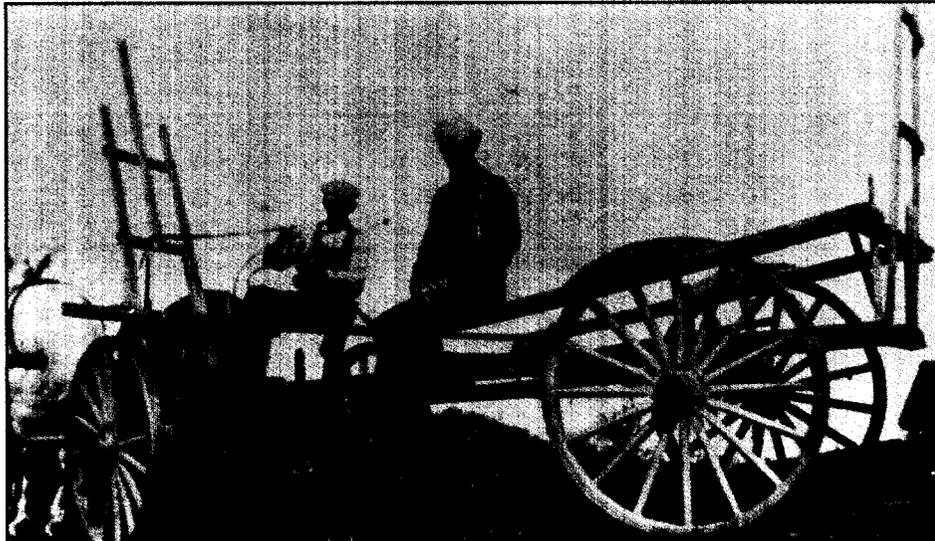
And there was another Irishman who we'll mention here, Samuel McLaughlin. The McLaughlin story is worth telling, not only for its Irish connection, but also because the farm that the his family would establish was typical of the subsistence farms common in the hilly terrain above the Mad River flood plain. The McLaughlin story also contains a chapter that paints a picture of "Yankee" determination and rural New England neighborliness.



Sam McLaughlin.
(Photo courtesy of Ann Day)

When McLaughlin first came to North America in about 1837, he was around twenty-one years old. After arriving by sailboat in Montreal, he took a stage to Burlington. The final leg of his trip involved a foot hike through Huntington Gap to his final destination in the Mad River Valley.

Sam only stayed a year or two before returning to Ireland, this time intent on bringing his family back to America. It was 1872. Times were hard in Ireland and his family was easily convinced to return with him. The family of nine crammed all their belongings into one crate and set sail for Halifax, Nova Scotia. After landing, they headed south and, once in Waitsfield, they settled down on a farm in that town. About a year later they bought the Colby farm in South Fayston, high on a "knoll" above Waitsfield village.



This photo, probably taken in the 1920s shows Samuel McLaughlin's sons Dan (left) and Sam Jr. resting on one of their wagons.

(Photo courtesy of Ann Day)

The Colby land had been in agriculture since Rufus Barrett, Fayston's first town clerk, began farming it in 1804. After purchasing the property from Colby, Sam McLaughlin continued the practice of diversified farming, necessary for success in the hills. Sheep and dairy farming would complement vegetable and feed crops. The woods would provide fuel, building materials and maple sugar. Though they did not sell milk outright, they did sell butter - 2500 pounds of it in 1880. They also produced eggs, wool, apples, corn, wheat and potatoes as well as cordwood and a small amount of saw logs for lumber. As was typical on the small farms, numerous barns and outbuildings were built to serve a variety of uses.

One such building was the "bank" barn, originally constructed around 1850. So called because of its location hard up against a slope or bank, this style of construction provided ground-level access to the main, second story. Hay from the third story loft could be easily thrown down to the livestock, housed on the main floor, while the bottom floor, which was below ground on one side and above ground on the other, could be used for manure storage and to house the smaller animals, such as sheep or pigs.

In 1904, the farm's 100th birthday, McLaughlin erected a new house on the foundation of the original one. Elegant but not extravagant, the construction is typical of the vernacular style found in many Vermont farmhouses of the era.

In 1923, a much larger barn was erected to the north of the farmhouse. Built to replace an older barn already in use, this building was actually recycled, a common occurrence on Vermont farms. The original building was erected in 1880 on the Huntley farm in Waitsfield, along the Mad River a few miles north of town. McLaughlin bought the structure from the Palmers, who were farming the land at the time. The barn was dismantled, stick-by-stick,



Raising the high bank barn on the McLaughlin farm, 1923. This barn was disassembled in Waitsfield, moved to Fayston, then reassembled piece by piece.
(Photo courtesy of Ann Day)

and the materials were carted south to their new location. The barn was rebuilt as the second “bank barn” on the farm. McLaughlin took the efficiency of this bank barn one step further by adding a “high drive” to the third floor.

This covered ramp, or “high drive”, provided a gradually sloping incline to the third floor. Thus, all three levels of the barn had easy outside access: the first floor was at ground level on the downhill side of the barn, the second floor was at grade level on the uphill side and above this, also on the uphill end, was the high-drive.

Almost Heaven

In a letter he wrote to Ann Day a few years ago, Guy Livingston recalled this story about Dan McLaughlin. It seems Dan was “something of a wit”. Farmers from throughout the Valley would bring their milk down to the creamery, located where the polo field in Waitsfield now sits. Guy wrote,

“Some days there would be, maybe, about two dozen “rigs” lined up from the creamery to Main Street. Those waiting to deliver their cream would pass the time of day with the others also waiting.

“One of the farmers often asked Dan about the temperature at his place. Dan would quote a temperature higher than that in the Valley, usually five degrees or more. The other asked Dan, ‘How can that be?’ Dan replied, ‘Maybe it’s because I live closer to the sun.’”

Cows no longer take shelter in the magnificent barn, but the barn, the farmhouse, the residence and 150 acres of McLaughlin land would become a refuge for generations of visitors who would come to “Knoll Farm”.

(At this point, it is worth briefly leaving our “time-line” travel to continue looking at developments on the McLaughlin farm. It would, through the years, become a property of ever increasing historical importance.)

The McLaughlin/Knoll Farm

Though probably not because of its proximity to the sun, Dan McLaughlin’s farm would become a spot that many future visitors to the Mad River valley would think of as heaven.

After Daniel’s death in 1932, three generations of farming this land came to an end. In 1935, the farm was sold to Burton Ward of Moretown, to be used primarily as a source of lumber for the Ward Lumber Company.

But land in Fayston, and indeed the rest of the Mad River Valley, had become valuable for more than just agriculture and forestry; many Americans were finding solace in rural retreats. In 1937, the McLaughlin farmhouse, the outbuildings and most of the land was sold to Dorathea Wilgoose of Needham Massachusetts who intended to enjoy the homestead as a summer retreat. Fayston was becoming a second home community.

Wilgoose, however, was anxious to share the beauty of the farm with others and soon began to entertain summer guests. Immediately after buying the farm, she hired Everett Marshall, the man who had built the original house in 1904, to come in and remodel it. Marshall raised the rear roof, added bedrooms and insulated the walls. He also installed modern plumbing – an “essential” for tourists.



Clarence Gallagher and Everett Marshal during construction of the McLaughlin house, around 1904. (Photo courtesy of Ann Day)

Guests soon began arriving, staying at the Wilgoose home for a few weeks every summer. In 1946, Dr Eunice Chapman and Alice Bisbee joined Dorathea in her “Knoll Farm project”. The three women would host tourists in an atmosphere free of encumbrances, with picnics, reading, hiking and swimming all on the daily menu. But agriculture would no longer play a role in the life of the Knoll Farm as their brochure clearly pointed out,

“Our emphasis continues on simple country living with time to be lazy and without organized activities. Our comfortable farmhouse we have converted for vacationing with every modern convenience. . There is now no active farming.”

But farming on the old McLaughlin farm was not dead. In 1957, Frank and Ann Day, a young couple with skiing in their blood and farming in their genes, bought the property from Dorathea Wilgoose. Frank and Ann had taught skiing wherever they lived. They ended up in Waitsfield and Frank joined Bud Phillips as an instructor in his Mad River Glen ski school; Ann would teach youngsters part time. But they were not the type to just sit back. In 1957, when they moved into Knoll Farm, they brought their horses with them. And they brought a dairy cow. And a pig. In 1960, they added Scotch Highland cattle. Farming had returned to the old McLaughlin place.

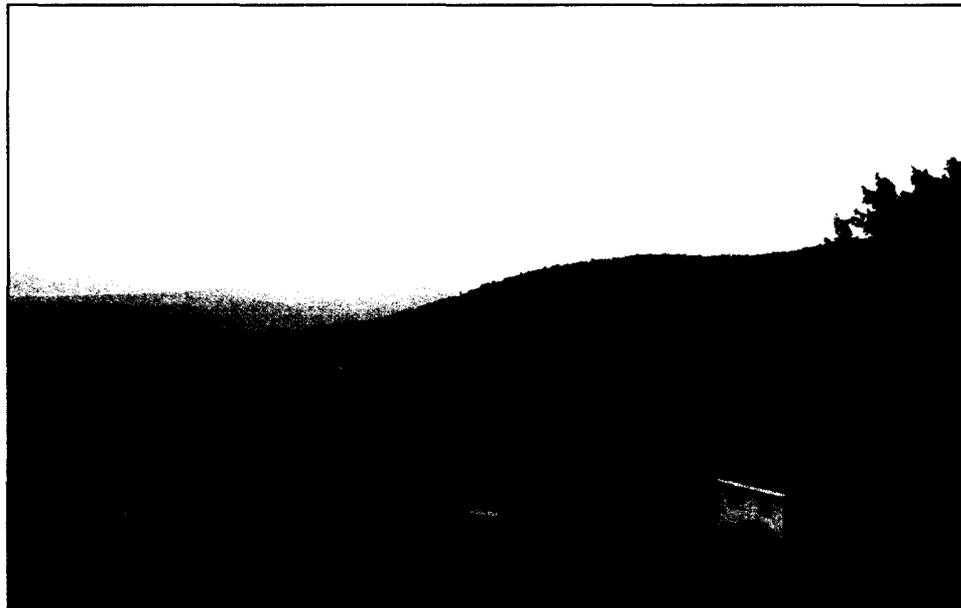
Visitors were always welcome to join in on the chores and barn work. Summer guests and winter skiers were all encouraged to help with the chores. "Chores" were an integral part of the vacation experience. For this, the guests were charged \$6.00 per day, breakfast and dinner included, or \$10.00 for the weekend.

Knoll Farm became the sort of place people would return to year after year - once people had a taste of the way of life, they often became hooked. Ann tells the following story of some elderly New York travelers. One day, in the late 1950s, an old Ford sedan drove up. Out stepped some elderly men, they appeared to be in their 80s. They were from New York and were looking for a place to stay for just one night.

In 1957, when they moved into Knoll Farm, they brought their horses with them. And they brought a dairy cow. And a pig. In 1960, they added Scotch Highland cattle. Farming had returned to the old McLaughlin place.

The next day, the men woke up for breakfast and decided they might stay for another day or so, if they could find a Catholic church first. Ann happily pointed them to St. Patrick's in Moretown. So the men stayed. And the next year they came back. And the year after that. They would become regular summer fixtures at the Knoll Farm, cheerfully blending in with animals and children - the old men from New York, here to stay "just one night".

It was the vision of Frank and Ann Day to create a place not just to visit, but to live. A place where people could experience for a time the simple, but no less meaningful, joys of rural life.



The McLaughlin/Knoll farm and the Mad River Valley below.

The Days became stewards of their land in the truest sense. With genuine appreciation of the farm's past history and mindful of the pressures currently placed on rural landowners, Ann Day entered a conservation agreement in 1983 with the Ottauquechee Land Trust (now the Vermont Land Trust). The agreement places development restrictions on the land and provides for continued forestry and agricultural use of the land.

A jewel was added to the crown when, in the early '90s, the property was recognized for its historical significance by its addition to the National Register of Historic Places.

The War Between the States.

Vermont sent a remarkable number of men to fight in the Civil War, and Fayston was no exception. No fewer than sixty-four men joined the Union Army in 1861 and 1862 – out of a population of 800 souls.

Twenty-nine year-old Samuel J. Dana was a private in the 13th Regiment, Vermont Infantry. In his letters to home, he left us a record of the emotional mixed bag of patriotism, homesickness and the occasional bitterness that was the lot of these young soldiers. The loneliness is clear when he writes from Fairfax Courthouse, Virginia,

“Dear Wife and Children,

I received a letter from you last Thursday with 15 stamps in it and was very glad of them and to hear from you. I received another (letter) from you today and one from Al Palmer and one from Joe Dudley. I am glad to receive one from *anybody*...”

The Civil war was as divisive an issue as any in this country's history. We get a sense from letters written during the period that not all citizens were equally enthusiastic about this war. Compare the sentiment in the following two letters. The first was written by Anna Bixby Bragg, sometime before 1865. The second was written by Pvt. Dana.

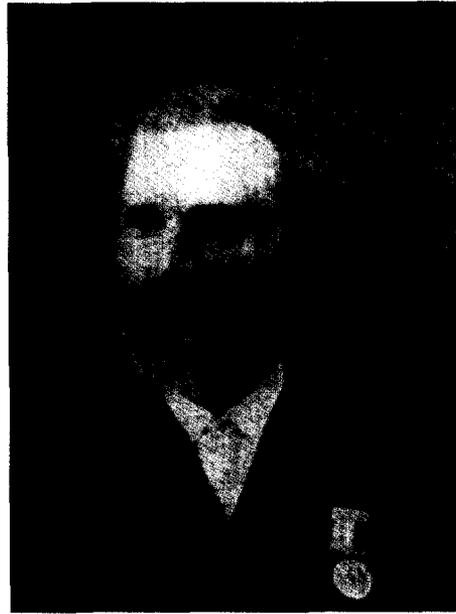
First, Anna Bragg,

“My Dear Sister Roxany,

How do you and Roswell feel about the war? Not much anxiety personally, I think I hear you answer, and I think too, perhaps the time is come when Roswell and Father will have reason to be thankful for the bodily infirmities that exempt them from military duty...”

Now, Pvt. Dana, writing, with bitter cynicism, on how his family should deal with chores piling up at home,

“...let the slash go, for there is so much patriotism in the men that are at home that I presume we would have to pay large wages. But thank God, if nothing happens I will be at home and I can do my own work, while some of the traitor cowards that have stayed at home finding fault with the army will take my place.”



Sam Dana, Civil War soldier, and Fayston lumber mill owner. This photo was probably taken in the 1870s. (Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)

He continues,

“There is a certain set of men or cowards in the North that are crying peace and want the North to compromise with the South. These I denounce as cowards and traitors and deserve no better treatment than rebels in arms and I believe we have a just God who will punish such men if they ain’t punished by men...”

The Scythe Tree – A Civil War Memorial

But many young men did respond to the call and left Fayston for the Army. One such man, a farm boy from North Fayston was working in the fields when he learned of the need for soldiers. He left the meadow where he was working, leaving his scythe resting in the crook of a nearby beech tree. It is assumed that the young man never returned and his scythe remained hanging in the tree, an unintended memorial to Fayston’s Union soldiers. The tree grew, eventually to wrap the metal blade in growing wood, as if holding on to the memory of the young farm boy turned soldier.



*Perley Boyce of North Fayston and the Scythe Tree -
note the scythe handle to the right.*

(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)

Fire and Water – Memorable Natural Disasters

During the period on either side of the Civil War, Fayston experienced some of its more memorable natural disasters. One event, in the mountains above North Fayston, left us another legend, the origin of the name “Burnt Rock”.

From the valley below, Burnt Rock has the look of a much taller mountain. The open, alpine appearance of the summit belies its 3100 foot elevation. No one seems to know for certain how the mountain came to be called Burnt Rock, but there is one story that seems to make sense.

Trudy Folsom, whose husband Ike was a Boyce family descendent, once recorded a colorful tale of James Peck Boyce, “mighty bear hunter”. As a young boy, James befriended a young lamb, which he named “Blackface” Wherever James went, Blackface was sure to follow. They were inseparable. One day, however, Blackface came up missing. His father, David Boyce, confirmed the sad news; Blackface had fallen victim to a hungry bear. Distraught, the young Boyce swore some day to avenge the young lamb’s death.

When he was old enough, James earned himself his own muzzleloader. From that time on, bear hunting became an obsession; James swore he would kill every bear in the area.

One spring, James and his cousin Dan set off bear hunting when they came across a big old bruin. Determined to take the bear, the two boys drove the animal high up into the mountains where they eventually cornered him in a cave. Growing impatient, the two decided to smoke the bear out and so struck a fire near the mouth of the cave. The bear finally emerged and James put the big animal down, but not before the boys had created a big problem for themselves – the fire had taken off and the woods around them were going up in flames.

“The bear finally emerged and James put the big animal down, but not before the boys had created a big problem for themselves”

Farmers from the valley below noticed the smoke on the mountain and ran from their plows to fight the fire. It was eventually extinguished, but not before the fire had destroyed the forest canopy and the thin, fragile undergrowth. The rocky surface that remained would never again support substantial growth.

Though memorable, the fire on Burnt Rock was not calamitous; there was no loss of life and no damage to personal property. Call it fate or call it good fortune, that seemed to be the way with Fayston’s natural disasters. In both 1841 and 1866, tornadoes were reported to have touched down in Fayston, and though there was significant damage to the forest, there is no record of lives or livestock being lost. Seemingly by the same good fortune, Hollis Mehuron and his family were spared their lives in what would be remembered as the Great Landslide of 1897.

Landslides were not unheard of in Fayston. Its western wall of mountains, steep and unstable in some places, was just the stage nature required for a slide. A period of heavy rain could at almost anytime precipitate an avalanche of rock and debris. The first landslide of record occurred in 1812. A second, larger slide occurred in 1827 and yet another in 1840. But most remembered is the slide that roared through Hollis Mehuron’s farm on the 14th of July 1897.

In her wonderfully detailed account of the landslide written for the *Country Courier* 100 years later, Earline Marsh paints a vivid picture of event. After a few days of heavy rain, Hollis Mehuron, whose farm lay at the foot of Mt. Ellen, was working in his potato patch, taking advantage of a break in the weather. He paused when he thought he heard thunder, but cries from his “women-folk” quickly alerted him that something more ominous was happening. The mountain was sliding down upon his land and toward his family. There was little he could do but hope and pray. And that must have worked, for the slide barely missed his residence – it took a sharp turn away just as it emerged from the woods behind the Mehuron house. Said Hollis, “My potatoes, my grain, and my mowing are all ruined, but I am happy that we are all alive.”

He paused when he thought he heard thunder, but cries from his "women-folk" quickly alerted him that something more ominous was happening. The mountain was sliding down upon his land and toward his family.

The deafening roar was heard for miles around, and for good reason. About 120 acres of timber went down with the slide. The average width of the avalanche was about 330 feet and it was as much as 80 feet deep in parts. Its course took it about three miles down from its beginning near the summit to the foot of the mountain, and from there it thrust itself nearly a mile further over relatively level ground. In the end, the landslide was four miles long and dropped 2400 feet in elevation.

It must have been quite the sight to see. In her 1898 Historical Sketch written for the Fayston Centennial Celebration, Anna Bixby Bragg wrote, "Those living near 'slide-off brook' saw a tremendous mass of floating trees, rocks and mud coming down the stream. Bridges, flumes and meadowlands were swept away by its resistless current. Before the summer was over, thousands of people from all about the country had visited its wonderful course." Fayston had become a "destination resort".



*Visitors to "Slide" Brook, the site of the great avalanche of 1897.
(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)*

Logs, Mills and Buried Treasure - Earning a Living

Merlin Ward used to tell a tale. According to Merlin, when Fayston lumbermen broke camp and moved on to a new wood lot, the travel was very rough. So rough, that to hear Merlin tell it, even the bedbugs had to get down off the wagon and walk.

Ward was one of the owners of the Ward Lumber Company, a Moretown operation that cut a significant number of trees in the Fayston forests. In the mid-1800s, Hiram Ward began lumbering in the neighboring hills of Duxbury and erected mills in Duxbury and Moretown to manufacture lumber products. In 1890 Ward purchased a sizeable tract in the Big Basin area and, in time, Ward Lumber Company would become one of the largest landowners in town. But Hiram and company were by no means the first to earn a living from trees.

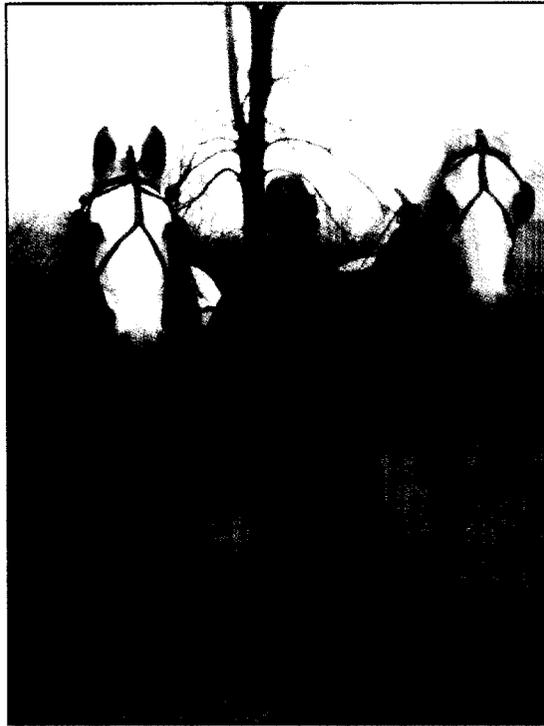
In 1816, when Joseph Marble built a sawmill along Shepard Brook, it would be the first one in town. It would also be the first of many sawmills along and above this stream. Marble, and those who followed him, realized the value to be had in lumber, and it was timber that would prove to be the backbone of Fayston's commerce and its only major export.

No fewer than four mills were established on aptly-named Mill Brook, including clapboard mills run by Samuel Dana, C.D. Billings and Hugh Baird. The Boyce, Brigham and Durkee families all operated mills in North Fayston as did John Grandfield, who ran a mill in the Big Basin area. By the turn of the century, Grandfield owned the largest sawing and milling operation in town. Evidence also exists of a steam-powered mill operating in Big Basin sometime after the Boyce and Grandfield mills.

Mills existed in other areas of town as well. John Chase operated a shingle mill on Chase Brook. Frenchman's Brook was the site of a mill operated by Daniel Posnett as well as a clapboard mill run by E. & O. Davis. It is believed that Frenchman's Brook was named after the large number of French Canadian lumberjacks who worked in the area.



*Workers at the Grandfield Mill, North Fayston.
(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)*



“Francis Moulton of S. Fayston seen here with his team, “Don” and “Dick”.

These mills became quite prolific. The Baird mill turned out about 200,000 feet of clapboards a year and the Billings mill produced three times that amount. The Dana mill was able to produce 1 million shingles and 300,000 feet of clapboards. Meanwhile, the first steam mill in town, that built by Calvin Mehuron, had a yearly production capacity of about 250,000 feet of lumber.

Whether in the mills or in the woods, making a living from the trees was hard work. But at least one early resident dreamed of an easier way to reap his rewards. In the early 1800s, as one legend has it, William Boyce caught wind of Spanish treasure, rumored to have been buried along Shepard Brook. And William was determined to find it.

Boyce employed one of the best men around to help in the search. He hired one Arad Sherman, a man of “mystical powers” in whose hands

“a witch hazel rod performed as many antics as the rod of Aaron.” Arad would hopefully make Boyce a wealthy man.

The pair began their reconnaissance of the brook with Sherman’s magical rod acting as radar. When Arad was certain that they had located the spot where the treasure was buried, he told Boyce to begin digging. And dig he did. “I found it!” he shouted as his shovel clanked against the treasure. At least he thought it was the treasure. For no sooner did the point of his shovel find the chest, did it begin to sink - deeper and deeper - until it was swallowed by the cold earth. Forever.

A New Century, and an Ever-Shrinking Town.

During the second half of the 19th century, Fayston’s population was sinking as fast as William Boyce’s treasure. By 1900, after reaching a peak of 800 residents in 1860, the population had fallen to 466.

On September 16th, 1898, on the lawn of J.B Thompson’s farm on Bragg Hill, over 500 people gathered to celebrate the Centennial of their town. The day was fair, and guests and speaker gathered “in the yard, beneath fine, old maples” to remember the town in speech, poems and song. The affair continued through the day, ending with dinner, more fine speeches and a musical presentation by the Waitsfield Coronet Band. It was truly a gala event. But one can’t help but think that there might have been a hint of melancholy in the hearts of the celebrants.



*“The townspeople gather to celebrate the 100 year birthday of Fayston.
The event was held at J.B. Thompson’s homestead on Bragg Hill.”
(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)*

The Civil War had exposed many of the town’s young men to the world outside. Additionally, land out West was there for the taking and many Fayston farmers, like others throughout Vermont, found the promise of flatter, more fertile farmland too tempting to resist. The thin, rocky hillsides of Fayston were suited for subsistence farming at best, while in the wide open West, fertile farmland and a more hospitable climate awaited them. It seems that, while the town was looking back on its first 100 years, there was little to celebrate but the memories. Many folks were leaving, and Fayston, it seemed, was just hanging on.

But there were those who refused to leave, men like farmer John Maxwell. Of Maxwell, Mrs. Anna Bixby Bragg wrote this in 1898:

“About 25 years ago he bought the Seth Chase farm and time has demonstrated that all prosperity does not consist in ‘going west, young man.’ Besides raising a large family, Mr. Maxwell has made more progress toward a competence than he who sold out and took Horace Greeley’s advice.”

It is fair to conclude that many residents who remained behind felt in a way betrayed by those who left in the great westward migration. And for those who did stay, life went on.

Fayston Schools in the 1900s – A Period of Consolidation

In the late 1800s, little had changed in the way Fayston students were being educated. School records from the No. 4 school indicate that the teacher, Hattie Mehuron, was paid a salary of \$144.11. Other school expenses included 11 cords of wood, two brooms totaling

\$1.20, and \$2.00 to pay for a cleaning woman. Building repairs for the year came to \$14.86. That was in 1893. But something else was going on in 1893 - the stirrings of change were coming out of Montpelier.

Adding political pressure to school districts already experiencing declining enrollment, the State of Vermont in 1893 mandated the dissolution of independent school districts. They were to be replaced with a single district administered by the town. The process of closing down individual schools in Fayston, however, would take over fifty years.

At the turn of the century, there were 6 schools in town, educating just over 70 scholars. By 1912, due to decreasing enrollment, there seemed little reason to run two schools in once thriving North Fayston, so the children from No. 2 school joined those in No. 4. Within twenty years, the effect of the population bust was dramatic. In 1930, only two schools were operating in all of town, No. 4 School, with sixteen students, and No. 9 in South Fayston. There were thirty-one students between both schools.



“Students of the original No.9 Schoolhouse (seen on the left) taken in 1913. The roof of the Riley Moulton farmhouse is barely visible on the hill above. The scholars, left to right: Back row: Milford Dorrett, Albert Lavanway, Winfield Dorrett, Francis Moulton, Matilda Miller, Evelyn Cota, Shirley Livingston. Middle Row: Otto Livingston, Mervin Maxham, Raymond “Bull Frog” James, Vaughan Pierce, Melvin Long. Front Row: Donald Cota, Evereyy Maxham, Eunice Bettis, Nora James,”
(Photo courtesy of Mrs. Riley (May) Moulton)

There were other signs of change as well. "Progress" was coming to town. Today we may boast of computers in every classroom. Our buildings are wired for connection to the world via the internet (indeed readers of this piece in a few years will likely chuckle at the talk of "wires" at all.) But in 1947, the concerns were a little simpler. From the school director's report of that year:

"Electric lights have been installed in the South Fayston School and will be available in the North Fayston school as soon as the current comes through"

And this, from this report two years later:

"The school directors found that the old foundation made the building unsafe and the chimney was condemned, so a complete renovation was in order. The work continued during the summer of 1949, and when the school reopened in the fall, the pupils, teachers, parents and friends found it hard to remember the old school as they inspected the utility and beauty of a very modern rural school, with an oil heater, flush toilets and lavatories...The room has a well planned arrangement of fluorescent lighting, and the teacher, with the help of the pupils, has purchased curtains for the large windows."



*The No. 9 class of 1961, Geneva Howes, teacher and George Armstrong, with his Jeep school bus in the background.
(Photo courtesy of the Fayston Historical Society)*

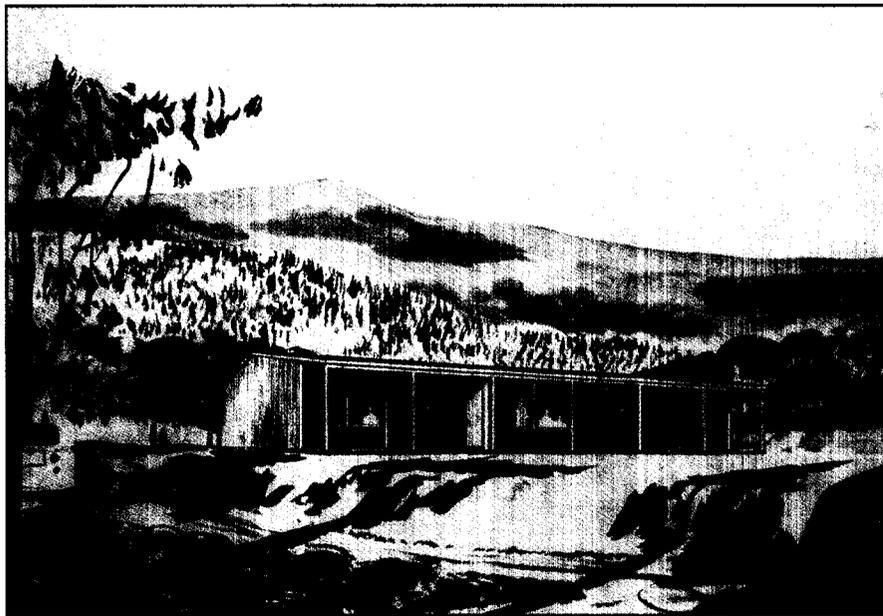
By the mid '50s Fayston was down to one school. Old No. 4 had rung its bell for the last time and only No 9 school was left.

Of course, consolidation of the schools made transportation of students all the more difficult. The days of moving a whole building to be nearer to the children was long gone. "Buses" came on the scene. Sort of.

In the 1950s Erlene Bragg, one of the school directors, asked George Armstrong of Center Fayston if he would provide transportation for children who may need it. George obliged; he was a natural. George's parents were actually in the "school bus" business themselves, having ferried kids to and fro in their 1930s Model "T" 1-Ton truck. "The Barge", they called it.

George modernized the operation by buying a 1954 Jeep Wagoneer. In his early "SUV", he drove twelve kids, "covering the whole town", getting them to school every morning by 9:00. Eventually, George was provided with a "real" twenty-passenger bus.

By 1957, the population of No. 9 school had dwindled to twelve students. An additional thirteen students attended high school; eight went to Waitsfield High School and four attended schools out of the area. Yet, in spite of these relatively low numbers, the aging wood frame building that served the town for so many years would soon need to be replaced, and in 1962, the voters approved a school bond to build a new, modern facility.



Fayston Elementary School, built in 1963

George Armstrong remembers the construction very well. It seems the foundation piers of the new school were of questionable quality. Inspecting the school site during construction, the school board members, Erlene Bragg, Hanne Williams and Augusta "Gussie" Graves noticed the less-than-perfect piers and were not going to let the apparent defect slide. Reminiscent of events in 1811, when the voters in town rejected the work done on the very first school, these school board members told the contractor do re-do the work and do it right. Says George, "They were a very good school board. And they were *women*." Amen.

The new, three room building was built high on a knoll above German Flats Rd., a ski pole's throw from the recently cut trails of the new Glen Ellen ski area. The two new neighbors, side by side, were symbolic of the changes that were happening in this once sleepy mountain community. The town report in 1964, the year after the new school opened, listed forty-three new landowners in Fayston. Thirty of these new property owners were from out of state.

Fayston is "Rediscovered".

In the early part of the 20th century, Vermonters were learning to ski. A pastime, that was at first a simpler way to "walk in the snow", was catching on as young Americans, ready for a new and exciting activity, took to the winter sport with enthusiasm. In turn, Vermont mountains were being transformed into ski areas and these ski areas brought with them an influx of tourists.

In 1940, a new single chairlift was installed in Stowe, with the "spectacular" uphill capacity of 200 skiers an hour! Roland Palmedo, a Navy pilot with a penchant for outdoor sports, was one of the original investors in the Stowe resort. Disillusioned with the commercialization of that ski community, Palmedo decided to create an area more to his liking. And so, in 1948, Mad River Glen was born.

Mad River and Glen Ellen.

"I would like to see Vermont ski areas stay as simple and rustic as possible. I don't think we need to import a lot of plush and sophisticated gimmicks. I am suspicious of man's efforts to improve nature." — Roland Palmedo

The dream of Roland Palmedo to create such an area came true in the winter of 1948. Earlier, he had flown by plane over the forest owned by the Ward Lumber Company and knew exactly where to build this dream. Below him lay a mountain with good exposure, on privately owned land and with a ribbon of a road, the old McCullough Turnpike, leading to its base.

Palmedo and others began hiking the mountain, scouting for the best trails. Shortly afterward, construction began on a new single chairlift and on "The Basebox", a solar friendly lodge at the bottom. Three to four feet of snow in the fall of 1947 delayed completion of the new lift however, and the grand opening was postponed until the following winter. On December 11, 1948, with Miss Vermont and a costumed "General Stark" on hand, Governor Ernest Gibson took a ceremonial ride to the top.



Howard Carr, Mad River Ski Patrol Chief makes the front cover of the February 1962 issue of "Skiing" magazine.

Over the years, Mad River would continue to develop at a pace in step with its philosophy. The mountain wasn't made overnight, so why should a ski area rush to cut a roadmap of trails? The addition of a double chairlift was to be the area's biggest concession to modernization, but the personalities of the trails in the "Sunnyside" area would remain purely "Mad River". Many skiers have credited general manager Ken Quackenbush and his crew with true artistry in their development of trails that are reflections of the mountain's terrain rather than mere avenues down its side.

Ownership changes have done little to alter the mountain's character. In 1972, the corporation was sold to a group of investors that included long-time Mad River ski patrolman Truxton Pratt and his wife Betsey. After the death of "Trux" in 1975, Betsey acquired full ownership of the area and vowed to steer the ship along the same course. And she did just that, for twenty years, until it was her time to sell.



Since the very beginning, Mad River Glen has inspired a singular dedication and loyalty in those who ski her trails. This devotion to this place has in turn been the inspiration for movements to “save” the mountain from unwanted development and change. In the 1990s, two attempts to create skier co-operatives that would buy and run the mountain were launched, but never reached their goal. But a third attempt was successful and, in December of 1995, The Mad River Glen Cooperative bought the area from Betsey Pratt.

In spite of the developments at Mad River, General Stark wasn't the only mountain in the Valley that could support skiers. So thought Walt Elliott, who in the early '60s looked up at Mount Ellen and saw promise. With little of the esprit that accompanied the development of Mad River Glen, and six years behind already successful Sugarbush Valley in nearby Warren, Elliott opened Glen Ellen on December 12, 1964.

Although never attaining the market share that its neighbors did, Glen Ellen offered something to skiers who perhaps were uncomfortable on the narrow trails of Mad River or who felt out of touch with the “jet set crowd” at “Mascara Mountain”, as Sugarbush was often called. In any event, Glen Ellen was a formidable mountain with some serious trails and, with 2,650 feet of vertical elevation, was the tallest of the three. That was good enough for Sugarbush, which, in the '70s, bought Glen Ellen and merged it with its existing area, greatly increasing its terrain.

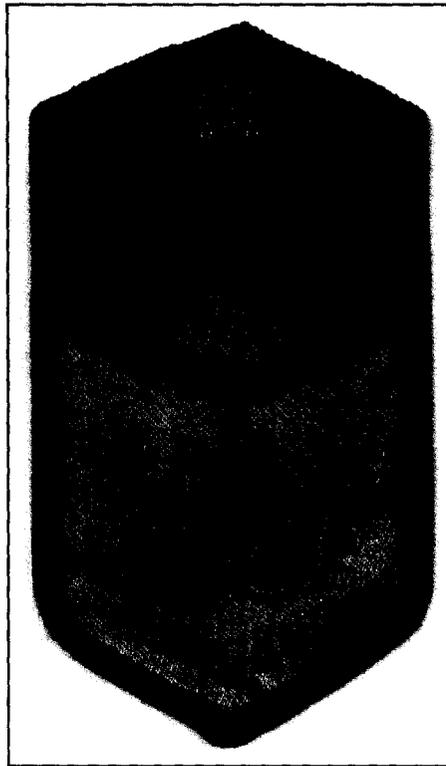
These large ski areas, Mad River and now Sugarbush, remain as Fayston's most visible industry. Through good winters and bad, they have endured. But we need to leave room in this chapter of Fayston's history for three little ski areas, nearly forgotten.

Francis and Ann Martin might forgive us for not mentioning the rope tow that they ran at the “Tucker Hill Lodge and Tow”, but the local folks, especially the kids who learned to ski there on weekends, “under the lights”, would never forget them.

Nor would the youngsters who learned to ski on the Village Rope Tow, which ran for one year, 1957, at the Knoll Farm. Powered by an old Buick engine, this tow was by all accounts, as thrilling as the ride down in skis. Ann Day, who ran the operation with her husband Frank, tells how Charlie Long used to get a kick out of running the lift real fast, "forty miles an hour they'd go. At the top, they'd just fly *off* the end."

The third little area was actually an independent operation, which shared some real estate with Mad River Glen. In 1964, Al and Jane Hobart, who were later instrumental in the founding of the Green Mountain Valley School, got a jump on ski instruction in the Valley with the construction of the Mad River Slalom Hill. Their intent was to fill a big hole in US ski racing. The couple had arrived in the Valley the year before and the area had already established itself as a recreational skier's Mecca. Yet there were no local programs devoted to the serious ski racer. A devilish racer himself, Al decided to change that and to prove the need for such a facility.

With the help of some Mad River mechanics, Al installed a 650-foot long rope tow, powered by a Plymouth Valiant engine and opened the Mad River Slalom Hill - 700 feet of pure racing. The program continued race training for three years.



Shoulder patch courtesy of John Hilferty

Guests and Ghosts — The Business of Hospitality

The opening of the ski areas brought an influx of skiers needing a place to stay, and in the late '40s, a boom of sorts occurred, as innkeepers began converting old homesteads into ski lodges. The hospitality business had arrived.

Nancy and Allen Clark were the first to open their doors to skiers in 1948. The young newlyweds were living in Franconia New Hampshire and were looking for a place to establish their own ski lodge. Dismissing Franconia, Conway New Hampshire and Stowe as "too well along", they considered the new ski area being developed by Roland Palmedo.

They decided to pay a visit to Walter Gaylord, a Waitsfield farmer and the only real estate agent in the Valley. After being shown three available properties along Rte 17, they settled on an old house with a wonderful view of the mountain. "The Clarks" was born.

Currently being run by Fred and Susan Spencer as the "Mountain View Inn", the original establishment was more of a lodge than an inn. After tearing down one of the two barns on the property "to improve the view", Allen and Nancy renovated the house to include two "he and she" bunk rooms, a semi-private room and a private room all on the

second floor. The charge? \$5.50 to \$6.50, breakfast and dinner included.

Down the road from the Clarks was another new establishment, "The Perkins". Henry Perkins, who opened this inn with his bride Virginia, would become a well-known figure in town and a Mad River Valley legend. Over the years he would become a lister, a justice of the peace, and most famously, Town Moderator, colorfully orchestrating the annual March town meeting.

Henry was a member of the famed 10th Mountain Division. Many veterans of this elite Army division, all excellent skiers, were settling in the area at the time. Bud Phillips was director of the ski school at Mad River and Cliff Taylor was an instructor. Sewall Williams, yet another veteran of the 10th Mountain Division, opened "Ulla Lodge" in 1948, the same year that "The Perkins" opened.

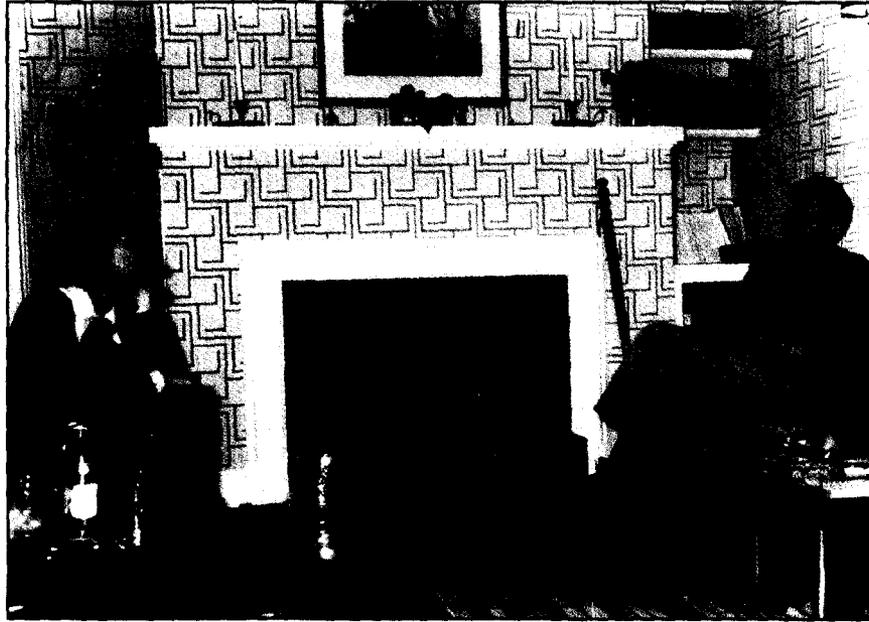
Like the other young innkeepers who timed their arrival in the Valley to coincide with the opening of Mad River Glen, Henry and Ginny Perkins took eagerly to the challenge of converting a "fixer upper" into a comfortable, if not elegant, guesthouse. They decided the old Dana homestead, on Rte 17 would work out just fine, though it was in a sorry state when they bought it in June of 1948. They gutted the old kitchen, fixed "country plumbing", shored up the feeble foundation and finally hung curtains, anticipating the first ski season and a ton of snow. Winter arrived, but as we know, the snow didn't; it would be February before any guests would stay at the lodge. It was a slow start for Henry, Ginny and the other lodge owners.

And it was slow going for the skiers when they did arrive. The slogan for the new Mad River could have been "Ski It If You Can *Get Here*". The trip to the Valley from New York was an eight-hour affair, and once here, the road up to the mountain offered an additional challenge. Nancy Clark will attest to that.

Remembering the awful condition of the roads at the time, Nancy Clark tells how Francis Martin, who ran "Tucker Hill Inn" down the road, used help out by driving his guests to the ski area in his old Jeep. He knew that otherwise his guests might spend the day not skiing, but getting their cars unstuck. Francis would sometimes stop by the other lodges on the way to the mountain, picking up guests who were all too happy not to drive.



Working on "The Clarks", Summer 1948.
(Photo by Henry Perkins, courtesy of Thom and Joan Gorman)



Ginny and Henry Perkins.

(Photo courtesy of Joan and Thom Gorman)

A Muddy Road and a Two-Toned Bridge

One spring, Sewall Williams and other Mad River enthusiasts figured they had a way to get the road fixed. They invited the Governor to pay a visit on a "perfect" spring day. As Sewall describes it, "The snow was at its best on Stark Mountain... and the dirt road the worst mud you've ever seen". They wined and dined the governor, his escort and his driver, and when the time was right, invited them all to head on up to the mountain. "After putting him in four different vehicles, we finally got him up to the area in a lumber truck. We hoped next year he would pave our access road. Instead, we got a new governor."

Henry Perkins was another innkeeper who did his best to improve the road to the mountain - after all, he was as affected as anyone was by the car-swallowing highway. The town selectboard was actually very sympathetic to the needs of the innkeepers and their guests, and would periodically budget funds toward paving sections of the dirt road, a half-mile or so each year. One year, the paving job reached enticingly close to "The Perkins" lodge, but the budget ran dry. Tempted beyond restraint, Henry hopped to action, mortgaged the inn and used his own money to continue the paving. Community involvement was alive and well.

There existed, at the time, an old, weathered covered bridge that reached across Mill Brook, from the McCullough Turnpike to German Flats road, the last such bridge in town. It was in plain site of Sewall Williams' newly purchased property. Thinking back, Sewall remembers a little vision he had. "I thought how lovely that bridge would look painted red, particularly after I had our houses and silo painted red." Could he paint the bridge, he wondered? If the answer was "yes", he would not only paint the bridge, but maintain it as well. He would check with John Downer, chairman of the selectboard.

In a week, John returned. Seemed it would be OK to paint the bridge. "So my right hand man, Sam Hall, went out and painted my side of the bridge red." But it wasn't long before John Downer returned, waving a petition. Some people were upset. "Who gave him the permission", they wanted to know? Confusion reigned, Sewall was in a pickle. "What was I to do but ask John if he would like me to remove those boards I had painted, for I couldn't remove the paint. I was told to paint no more. So we had a lovely red covered bridge going up Rte 17, and a barn siding colored bridge coming back."

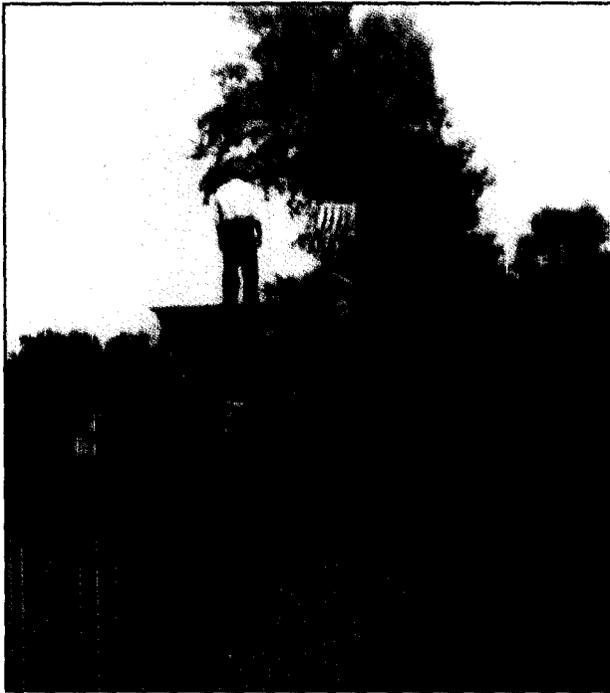
Yes, these innkeepers were an eager group.

New inns, lodges and condominiums have sprung up along Rte 17 ant the German

Flats road over the last fifty years or so. They are too numerous to mention here, but all are part of the new, tourist-based economy. A few, like Otto and Elsie Becher's "Birchluff" have closed their doors. Others have changed hands, like "Tucker Hill" and the "Hyde Away", formerly "Ulla Lodge". Another to change hands was the "Millbrook Inn and Restaurant", which was originally the "Perkins".

Thom and Joan Gorman left jobs in New York over twenty years ago to live their dream when they began entertaining guests at the "Millbrook Inn". Their style of hospitality befits the valley in which they settled. It is laid back, and casual; it feels original and "home made", like the meals they offer guests. Those who stay tend to be regulars, who think of Millbrook as a "home". One guest in particular comes calling most anytime, with never a reservation. Joan and Thom think the guest's name is Dana, most likely the late Mrs. Dana, fourth wife of old Jack Dana.

Jack Dana was the former owner of the house that now serves as their inn. Mrs. Dana died many years ago and was laid out in the front parlor. But she still takes to making appearances now and again. Mrs. Dana is occasionally seen out of the corner of the eye. She can sometimes be heard shuffling her feet upstairs. Once, she apparently locked the bathroom door from the inside and left, leaving guests and owner struggling to enter. On a quiet evening, she has been heard plucking a note on the zither, which hangs on the den wall. In any event, she is a polite guest who seems to have a fine time during her visits back home.



A paving crew works its way up Rte 17 past "The Perkins". (Photo by Henry Perkins courtesy of Joan and Thom Gorman)

The growth of the hospitality industry is part and parcel of having a ski area, or two, in your backyard. Another possibility is that, by pure fortune, a small group of educators would gather in the shadow of the same mountains and decide that skiing and learning can go hand-in-hand. Thus convinced, they would start a school. And a good school at that. That's just what happened here just under thirty years ago.

The Pursuit of Sport and Educational Excellence – The Green Mountain Valley School

“The pursuit of excellence in life is the mission of all who participate in the Green Mountain Valley School. From a base of integrity, stimulated by curiosity and guided by knowledge, we are committed to this quest in an environment which fosters understanding, respect, and appreciation of diversity.” This is the mission statement of the Green Mountain Valley School. By all measures, they are succeeding.

In 1973, Al Hobart, John Schultz, Bill Moore and Ashley Cadwell decided to start a school, a skiing school for kids who had it in them to be good racers - and good students. The four men, with skiing in their blood and education in their genes would call it the Mad River Valley School and Al's house would be its campus. It was to grow into one of the most respected ski academies in the country.

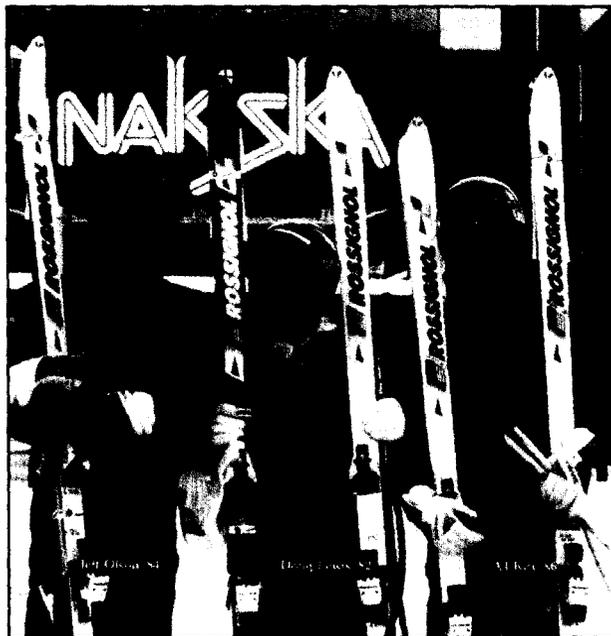
The four men convinced twelve students to come to Vermont from November through March. Here they would receive intense instruction in skiing techniques and personal tutoring in lesson plans provided by their home high schools. The success of their dream relied on solid principles – a sound educational philosophy and a committed student body - along with a measure of good luck.

The principles were in place, but good fortune was in short supply. During the first year, Bill Moore broke his leg and John Schultz became seriously ill. Hobart, Cadwell and their small staff, which included Jane Hobart and Annette Schultz, were left with the formidable challenges of nurturing a new business and leading a group of 12 active teenagers.

After the somewhat rocky first year however, it appeared the project would work, and the school moved to the Schultz's place in Moretown village, where an existing barn provided room for expanded classroom and dorm space. Now a fully accredited secondary school, GMVS would move back to Fayston in 1980. This time they purchased a house and six acres, part of the former Brothers' farm from Lucy Peatman (Brothers). There, on Moulton Road, they would build the campus that exists today. Originally they erected three dorms and a dining hall; a soccer field was added shortly afterwards. The original farmhouse, built in the 1850s, would serve as the administration building.

From the beginning, this was no ordinary school. “Your classes include *skiing*?” But admission to the school required that the students not only showed the potential to excel in ski racing, but also had the discipline to stick to a strict educational regimen. This place was no walk in the park.

To the credit of the founders, their staff and the student body, the formula proved to be successful. Twelve graduates have skied on the U.S. Olympic Ski Team. Doug Lewis and A.J. Kitt, earlier World Champion medalists were joined by Daron Rahlves who won the World Championship Gold in 2001. Scores of colleges from Albion College to Yale University have welcomed GMVS graduates. And GMVS continues to welcome young bright men and women to its campus at the foot of Bragg Hill.



*Green Mountain Valley School graduates and Olympic skiers. Left to right: Jeff Olson '84, Doug Lewis '82 and A.J. Kitt '86. Doug Lewis resides just up the hill from his alma mater in the former Vasseur farm house where he lives with his wife Kelley.
(Photo courtesy of Al Hobart)*

What Does the Future Hold?

Thus ends our very brief travel through Fayston's history. It is tempting to begin to write the next chapter, but that is too presumptuous.

It may be safe to say that small business will grow, that the ski areas will remain dominant and that agriculture may hold on through the efforts of small, specialty growers, maple sugar producers and animal husbandry industries, like the Icelandic Horse Farm. It is probably also safe to say that the town population will continue to grow, but at an eventually moderating rate, as the best land is either used up or set aside for preservation.

But all of this is conjecture. Technology developments make industries, previously unheard of, increasingly commonplace. And technology advances can make small change of one-time environmental constraints. We shall see in time how it all works out. Later histories will record the stories we are about to write.

But there is much the residents of Fayston can do to chart the course. We can put in our two cents worth at land use hearings, like the ones currently dealing with Big Basin. We can vote our will at Town Meeting. We can run for office, or even put our money where our mouth is, like Henry Perkins did. It is the residents of town that form the continuous bridge between our past and our future. Residents like Robert and Arthur Vasseur.

Robert and Spike

It is late evening and Robert Vasseur tends to the evaporator as steam rises up and out the roof, leaving the ever-sweetening syrup behind. Robert's brother Arthur, the guy everyone calls "Spike", has just left on the tractor to bring in more sap from a distant collecting station. Members of their family, some neighbors and friends are busy with various other chores in the sugarhouse. They are busy, but it is a distinctive Vermont type of busy. Steady, focused, satisfying work. "Joyful" might be a good way to describe the work. Everyone in the sugarhouse seems truly happy being there, carrying on an old tradition.



Robert Vasseur
(Photo by Rick Haynes)



"Spike," his nephew and friend Thomas
(Photo by Rick Haynes)

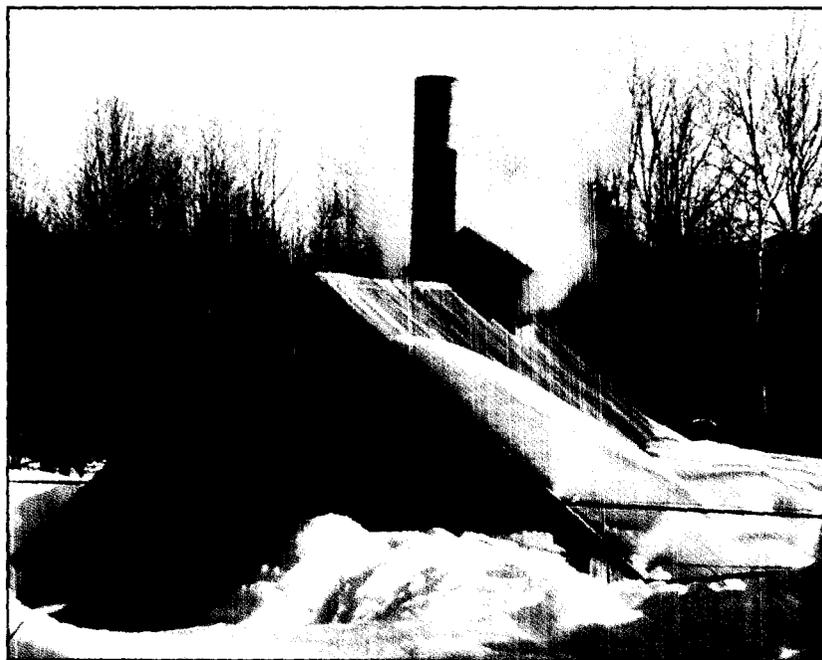
Most people in town are at home, eating dinner or watching television. The lifts at Mad River Glen and Sugarbush are closed for the day. The Fayston elementary school is nearly dark, there is one car in the lot. Three students outside the GMVS gym are kicking a ball around in the snow. Two girls and a dog are jogging in the mud down Bragg Hill. Before long it will be too dark to go jogging. For most people, the workday is over.

Not for Robert and Spike Vasseur. They once farmed this hill where Lynde Wait first settled and where the Thompson family first farmed in 1798. And as all farmers know, work pays little respect to the clock. Weekends come once a year, maybe. And in March, when the maples say so, the sap flows and sugar must be made.

Their parents, Leon and Emma, moved here from Westford in 1932. Arthur and Spike eventually took over the operation and worked the farm with remarkable efficiency. In 1981, they were recognized as Vermont Dairy Farmers of the Year. Their production average that year was 22,500 pounds of milk per cow, the average Vermont farmer milked somewhere around 14,500 pounds. "Good breeding", says Robert. "And feeding the fifty-eight or so Holsteins eight or nine times a day." Such a life must not leave much of time for outside interests, especially time-hungry public service positions.

But the Vasseur brothers found the time. Spike was Fayston Town Treasurer. In 1959, Robert was elected to the selectboard, a position he holds to this day. In 1959, the total town budget ran around \$21,000 dollars. In 2001, the budget was close to thirty times that number. Change happens.

The Vasseurs no longer farm, having sold off their last cow in 1987. But they still draw sap from some 3,500 taps, and every spring, when the conditions are just right, the Vasseurs gather to make syrup. Tradition lives.



Post Script.

I need to make an apology.

As I met the people in town to research and write this story, I began to forget that I am not a resident of Fayston. I live next door, in Moretown. But as I met Faystonites in their kitchens, and places of business and in the sugarhouse, I would continually lose my identity. I was getting too close. I tried to remove myself from this position in my writing, but found it impossible. I kept finding myself saying “we” when referring to Faystonites, not “you”, as would be more accurate. Re-writing this transgression didn’t work. So I left it that way, and it feels ok. I thought I should tell you this.

Another thing. There are far too many places and events and characters left out of this short history. Names and the stories behind them should be explained when there is more time and space. Pigeon Hollow. The Battleground. McCullough Turnpike and Mill Brook Road. Events like the 1937 “Old Home Days”. And people, scores of them, alive and gone, of whom whole books could be written. The road crews. Town clerks. Teachers. There are individuals I’ve met who have stories that others would die to hear. There are even more people I would have liked to have met. I can’t mention names, for I would certainly, in oversight, leave some out. There is much left to be written.

To everyone kind enough to open their doors or return my phone calls, a million thanks.

Lastly, and most important, take the time to meet your neighbors. Share stories. Take plenty of pictures and save them. They will be priceless someday. Our Fayston descendants will be happy we did.

Rick Haynes is a freelance writer who lives in the Mad River Valley with his wife Patti and sons Patrick and Thomas. He is the owner of the owner of WriteSideUp!, a desktop publishing business located in Moretown.

The Scythe Tree

A half mile in from Four Corner Road
a beech tree stands in shadowed glade.
Its soft black bark is roughly scarred
from black bear claws and jackknife blade.
The trunk has hollowed with old age,
the branches twist in shapeless forms.
The crisp leaves cling to slender twigs
throughout the fall and winter storms.
A curved and rusted blade protrudes
from the flank of the ancient tree.
The neighbors say it's been there since
eighteen hundred sixty three.
The story goes that a farmer's boy,
while in the meadow mowing hay,
heard the call to take up arms,
and left to go to war that day.
He hung his scythe in the nearby beech
as he went off to join the strife.
Today that tree and scythe remain;
a memorial to that farm boy's life.

Ann B. Day