



# THE WATERBOROUGH

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## FIRE OF '47

by Jim + Jane McGrath

On Friday, October, 17, 1947, Waterboro received a fire alarm. It was evening and the Waterboro Fire Company answered the call to help put out the fire which was between Ross Corner and Newfield. The Waterboro men stayed all night and had their part under control, but at the Shapleigh side the fire was still out of control the next day. By Sunday, October 19, the fire had spread into Waterboro and burned over 1200 acres. There had been no rain to wet things down in 108 days and the woods were like tinder. At times there were high winds spreading the fire. On October 20, Ossipee Mountain was all in flames. Much of the mountain burned Monday night, lighting up the dark sky, silhouetting the burning trees and fire tower against the horizon. The fire coming over the crest of the mountain was like the explosion of cannons! The men who began fire fighting on Friday were still at it day and night, many without sleeping only eating what was lugged to them.

For the first few days Ross Corner was the headquarters of the Red Cross and women from Waterboro kept busy carrying food and coffee for the tired men. The firemen fought hard and saved the homes along Ossipee Hill Road. They had 100 plus oil and dairy trucks with water and hundreds of other men were there with drums, vats, and cans of water, even wet brooms, answering the selectmen's plea for help.

A single line of hose was laid 9200 feet through couplings of six pumpers to save several buildings.

By Tuesday the state had stepped in to run the fire fighting operation. Waterboro was still burning but rather slowly and the villages seemed to be safe that day and part of the night. The villages were hustling with life—the Army and Navy had sent out men to police the roads and help with fire fighting. No outsider was allowed to pass through Waterboro. Patrols milled about all night long on the 22nd, as they were working to keep the fire at the west side of Route 202 in South Waterboro. It had burned during the day to Route 202 in East Waterboro and was burning in the area between Route 202 and North Waterboro. Waterboro was waiting expectantly, fearfully, as the fire was approaching them. Men and equipment were parked along the roads waiting for the fire to get close enough to fight it.

And then a “miraculous” back draft shortly after 6 a.m. on the 23rd, diverted the flames from the raging fire and North Waterboro was saved.

The church, several homes, the post office, and general store of this part of town were safe. Meanwhile, almost three score residents and volunteers trapped for more than an hour behind a wall of fire in North Waterboro managed to escape. Confusion reigned as



workers and residents fled from the flames fanned by winds nearing hurricane proportions.

Fire was then raging towards a section of Waterboro Center and East Waterboro again on this worst day of the holocaust. Fire trucks and apparatus were trapped by the rapid approach of flames, and all organized resistance was disrupted. Gale winds prevailed all day long on this Thursday the 23rd, and families fled their homes and volunteers and professional workers battled grimly for the life of the town and nothing puny men could do would hold this forest fire in check.

About noon of this day the fire jumped the road on Route 202 in South Waterboro and swept along the road. The greatest part of South Waterboro was lost, as 58 homes were leveled in the flames. The fire traveled along the roadways, going up the side roads, gobbling up the houses, with the people having only a brief warning to escape with their lives. It had been thought that the fire line would hold at Route 202.

By this time the Red Cross headquarters had been set up in the Grange Hall at South Waterboro. A great deal of food was there and men were sleeping on the

floors. They were too tired to eat. Then the Grange Hall was evacuated and the Red Cross moved away as the fire was moving in on both sides of it. There was an exodus from Waterboro one car behind the next, each filled to the brim with belongings and people, headed out the lower end of town. Fire was all around them, coming closer and closer to the homes, with no fire equipment in sight and no one there to fight it. There seems to be no explanation for the lack of firemen and equipment in South Waterboro at the time. So it was Thursday, October 23, the most fatal day. Austin H. Wilkins, Maine's supervisor of forest fire control at that time, gave this graphic description of the happenings:

"It was awesome sight to see the solid walls of roaring fire sweeping over the mountain and across level areas, consuming everything in their path. The smoke hung so thick and heavy for days over the area that it was difficult at times to determine just how near or how far away the fires were. The sun did not penetrate through the thick wall of smoke for over 10 days. Men using trucks, cars, and bulldozers had to use their headlights as much in the daytime as at night." The sound of the rushing fires, sometimes on fronts several miles long, was described as a continuous frightening roar.

Francisia Hamilton of this town writes: "The post master had 57 families to whom he delivered mail on his route and there are only 12 families left. Helen Powell's house went about 5 p.m. (on Thursday the 23rd), and in it she had stored all the lovely rugs that she made through the years, usually she stores them at Watkins in Portland. Dr. Brooks place went, and the new apple storage place Henry Brock had built and all the thousands of apple trees. Tom Wallace's antique house and Bullard's. The fire went down to Goodwin's Mills but spared the homes of that town. Waterboro Center was spared and the YWCA buildings and all that part of the lake still stands as it was (the southern end of the lake.) All the cottages on the other side (NW) of the lake went and the fire jumped the lake and took all the cottages up to the point . . . They saved the houses along the Old Corner Road. From the cemetery down, it burned on both sides until you come to the Freeman Smith house. Then it took the lower end of the village (South Waterboro) from Carrie Libby's Town leaving two houses on that side (Route 202), Bernice Field's and the Smith house and two opposite it, Linwood Rollins and Malcolm Smith's. Took everything from the four corners on up. Took the box shop. 20,000 acres of Timberland were burned over, leaving only 4000 acres of unburned woodland."<sup>1</sup>

Can it happen again? No! Because the state has increased its fire prevention man power. No! Because there's more equipment. No! Because on the community level there has been an increased interest in volunteer fire departments. But Yes! The holocaust could happen again because of the density of our forest cover.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From the Journal of Francisia Hamilton which she wrote at the time of the 1947 fire. Resident of Waterboro.

<sup>2</sup>Material based on Portland Press Herald news accounts from October 19 through October 23. From the Press Herald Library, Guy Gannett Building, Portland, Maine.

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## INFORMATION WANTED

### NOCK – EMERY – BRANNAN

Sarah Nock (born April 23, 1773—died 1838 (?) in Saco) married Theo Emery, April 16, 1796. Both were of Waterborough.

Sarah Emery, of Waterborough, widow, married Thomas Brannan (born 1755 in Waterford, Ireland—died 1837 (?) at Saco) in September, 1805, in Saco. Information about any of the above wanted, including parents, and places of burial. Contact William Randel in Waterboro.

WANTED—Any information on Elder James Gray. Althea Hanscom, W. Waterboro.

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## TOWN HOUSE PROPERTY

by Arlene Jellerson & Evelyn Thompson

The Town House property sets on a portion of that land traced from John Maddox to John Hamilton Jr. to Benjamin R. Hamilton to James Roberts to Joseph Roberts to Jamin & Mary Seavy of Sanford to Jeremiah Carll of Waterborough.

"I, Jeremiah Carll of Waterborough, County of York, State of Maine as a free and unqualified gift to Waterborough Centre Baptist Society, a religious Society duly established according to the law in the Town of Waterborough aforesaid, a certain piece or parcel of land situated in said Waterborough near the Centre (being the same lot of land that the said Jeremiah Carll purchased of Jamin and Mary E. Seavy by deed dated the 28th day of April A. D. 1879 and recorded in York Co. Reg. of Deeds Book 369, Page 20) lying on the Easterly side of the road leading from Waterborough Centre Village to Waterborough Ctr. Depot opposite the dwelling house of Elizabeth Ford and bounded as follows:

Beginning at a stone set in the line of the road and marked (1?) thence running easterly across the lot

now of John Durgin 6 rods to a stone set on said Durgin's line marked "B" thence on a line parallel with the road in a southerly direction to a corner of the lot of Durgin's land to a stone marked "A", thence on a line of the lot of Durgin's land and a stone marked "2", by Durgin's land to the road—westerly to a stone marked "F" thence by the road to the place begun at containing fifty-four rods.

Frank J. Stanly  
Jeremiah W. Emery

Jeremiah Carll  
Catherine Carll

1879

(Obviously this deed and the one from Jamin and Mary Seavy to Jeremiah Carll were not recorded until sixteen years after the property was sold to the town of Waterborough, as that deed was recorded in 1863.)

Taken from E. G. Knights, "History of Waterborough" is the following original minutes of the sale of pews in 1834 in the Carle's Corner Meeting House. (This gives us the approximate age of the building as well as a partial list of members of that date.)

"At a meeting of the Proprietors of the Carle's Corner Meeting House on Saturday the 13th day of September, 1834:

1st voted and made choice of Benjamin Hamilton,  
Moderator.

2nd voted and made choice of Porter Gilman, Clerk.

3rd voted to sell the remaining unsold pews, 13 in number.

4th voted said pews be set up at auction and sold to the highest bidder.

No. 38 sold to John Nason for	\$16.65
No. 48 sold to Jesse Gilman	15.00
No. 27 sold to Peter Frost for	11.00
No. 24 sold to Caleb Lassell for	11.00
No. 19 sold to Miles Ford for	11.25

No. 18 sold to Porter Gilman for	\$11.52
No. 17 sold to Jonathan Downing for	11.20
No. 16 sold to Timothy Ricker for	12.00
No. 14 sold to Jesse Gilman for	15.00
No. 7 sold to Benjamin Hamilton for	10.50
No. 50 sold to Isaac Dearing for	10.30
No. 2 sold to Isaac Jellerson for	15.00
No. 3 sold to Abel Jellerson for	15.00

The pulpit was at the East end of the building, while above was the reserves section for the choir."

We, Peter Frost, James Leavitt and James K. Huntress, a committee chosen by the Proprietors of the Meeting House at Waterborough Centre to act on behalf of said Proprietors to sell and convey said house in consideration of the sum of \$300.00 paid by the Town of Waterborough.

The receipt whereof we do hereby acknowledge, give, grant, bargain and convey unto the said Town of Waterborough, their assigns forever, the Meeting House at Waterborough Centre with the land which said house stands on, and running ten feet back on the North end of said house, front and each side as the lot is owned by the Proprietors, the Proprietors holding by agreement in said house to hold religious meetings and funerals.

Albert Cole  
Asa Rhodes

Peter Frost  
James Leavitt  
J. K. Huntress

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## HOUSE RESEARCH

At this point several Historical Society members are considering doing research on houses in town for a fee. The proceeds will go to the Society. The details of this project have not been completed, but we would like to have your reaction to this proposed project. If you or someone you know would like the history of a house in Waterboro done, please contact Evelyn Thompson or Jane McGrath.

## CRAFT FAIR '78

The day of our 4th annual Craft Fair, August 5, dawned bright and sunny and judging by the number of people there and total receipts of \$682.56, was a success in every way. The usual tables did well: baked foods, snack bar, white elephants, crafts, children's, books, plants/herbs and raffle items. The museum room was set up as an old time nursery.

We wish to thank everyone who contributed, whether it was their time, money or items donated for sale. We hope to make our 5th Fair an even bigger success by getting all committee heads this fall and holding workshop meetings all winter. We welcome all volunteers and suggestions.

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## WATERBORO — HISTORY AND EARLY TOWN RECORDS by James E. Carll Part II

In the last issue of "The Waterborough" an early history of the town and important events that occurred up to the year 1807 were recorded. Before progressing into the year 1808 it might be interesting to explain just who was voting on the great issues of the day. "The male inhabitants of said town being twenty-one years old and resident in town for the space of one year next preceeding having a freehold estate within said town of the annual income of ten dollars."

In the year 1808, Andrew Burley, James Carlisle, and Henry Sayward were the elected Selectmen and Assessors of the town along with 47 other elected officials. Also at that annual town meeting, \$1600 was raised for roads, \$233.34 was raised for schools, and \$100 for town expenses. The meeting was held at the Elder Henry Hobbs' Meeting House on Ossipee Hill Road.

On September 12, 1808 at a special town meeting it was voted that James Carlisle, Andrew Burley, Esq., and Michael Bowden draft, sign, and forward a petition to "the President of the United States to suspend the operation of the laws laying an embargo

(if that power be invested in him) if not to call Congress together as soon as may be to take such measures preventative thereof as they may think proper."

In 1809, a committee consisting of Joseph Gerry, Daniel Sedgley, and Paul Chadbourn was chosen to build a bridge over the Ossipee River. In the warrant it was referred to as the Limington bridge, in a record of the vote it was referred to as Edgely's Bridge, today we know it as Edgecomb's Bridge. One hundred dollars was raised to construct said bridge.

On September 7th of the same year the line was preambulated betwixt the town of Shapleigh and the town of Waterboro. It ran as follows, "began on the south side of Little Ossipee River at a certain large rock to the east side of a Norway Pine tree standing about ten feet to the westward of said rock marked with a G. W. on the south side of said tree and running southerly to the southwest corner of Waterboro about ten feet to the eastward of a certain maple tree marked with a W. G. S. which we mark on this day." Signed by John Leighton and John Bodwill, Jr., Selectmen of Waterboro.

In 1810, Benjamin Pierce, Paul Chadbourn, Jr., and Henry Sayward were elected to serve as Selectmen and Assessors. Also elected were Elders Henry Smith and Henry Hobbs as Public Protestant Teachers of Piety, Religion, and Morality in said town of Waterboro. There evidently was to be a large meeting of some type held in June of this year for it was voted that "there shall be no tent erected within one hundred rods of Elder Henry Smith's meeting house at the time of the Association be holden.

In 1811, the same men were elected Selectmen. The third Article of the warrant read, "To see what method the town will take with regard to wildcats, foxes, and crows." It was voted that two dollars be given on wildcats, fifty cents on foxes, and no money be given for killing crows.

In the year 1812, a man could earn 12½ cents per hour working on the roads. Also, it was voted not to give the Shakers their school money to school by

themselves but that they could work out their highway tax by themselves.

The bridge over Buffoms Brook was again a matter of public vote in 1812. The article in the warrant was "To see what method the town will take to keep Buffoms Brook Bridge so called in repair and also what method they will take to get recompense of the mill owners for keeping said bridge in repair." The vote at the meeting was "that the agent of the town be authorized to prosecute the mill owners of the mill standing on the bank below Buffoms Brook Bridge for damage done to said bridge."

In 1813, it was voted that Alfred would be the location of a fire proof building for the purpose of keeping the records of the County of York.

The ultimate (hopefully) solution to the Buffoms Brook Bridge problem was "that the agent of the town be authorized to make the following proposals to owners of the saw mill that stands on Buffoms Brook so called, that the owners of the saw mill may name fifteen men in the towns of Limington, Hollis, Lyman, Sanford, and Lebanon three of each town and our agent may take five out of that number, that is one out of each town, or the agent may name five persons and the owners may choose the five persons in the towns one from each and submit the controversy to them and abide by their judgment."

Records are scant for business transacted in the town during 1814 and 1815.

In 1816, the people of Waterborough voted not to partition the legislature in Massachusetts to have a division of this state and have the district of Maine erected into a new state.

(to be continued)

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WATERBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Life Members for '78

Bradford and Hazel Cushman  
Francesca Hamilton

Edith Hughey  
Avis Hughey  
Linda J. Mills  
William and Janet Randel  
John Elmer Woodward  
Warren and Marguerite Dawe  
Daniel and Jane Willet  
Edith Heck  
Vance D. Porter  
Edith L. Pierce  
Priscilla Burt  
Francis Madiera  
John and Althea Hanscom

all from Waterboro

Donald and Marjorie Ricker	Falmouth
Elsie A. Davis	Alfred
Wilma Rollins	Sanford
John and Virginia Hewes	Saco
Andy Ford	Portland
Ethelinda Innes	Saco
David and Diane Deering	Hollis Center
Helen Brock	Annadale, VA
Mrs. Richard Cunningham	Newbury, MA
Linda Hanscom	Coral Gables, FL
Elizabeth Atkins	East Montpelier, VT

#### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

If you are interested in joining the Waterborough Historical Society, please clip and mail the following application form.

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#### WATERBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: \$2.00 per year, Life Membership, \$15.00.

Mail to:

JEAN GRANT  
NORTH WATERBORO  
MAINE 04061

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