

2015 Fremont Town History: The Year in Review

Compiled by: Matthew E. Thomas

The Winter of 2015 will long be remembered as one of the most challenging and coldest winters on record here in the Northeastern United States. There were numerous cold, frigid, blustery winter nights in January. The first major snowstorm took place on January 20th, followed by the Blizzard of 2015 which took place between January 26-28 dropping 28 inches of snow here in Fremont. Schools & businesses all over New Hampshire were closed and most people stayed home making it unusually easy for snow plowers to clear the streets and highways. The State of NH also waived tolls on all interstate highways for the day--a highly unusual practice. This was supposedly the 6th largest Blizzard in New England history but this historian sincerely doubts that claim.

Snow drifts on Beede Hill Road – February 2015 Photo Courtesy of Mark Pitkin



February was the coldest & snowiest February on record with two blizzards, and one Nor-Easter, along with several smaller snowstorms occurring

during the first three weeks of the month -- forcing schools & businesses to close again. Townspeople had to be diligent about breaking down ice dams and shoveling snow off roof-tops, some piling up with over three-feet of snow on many roofs. Many buildings in southeastern New Hampshire collapsed or had cracks in walls due to the weight of snow on roof-tops. Six or seven foot-high snow-banks had not been this high since the Winter of 2010-2011. Snow-plowers were stretched to the max working overtime trying to keep up with all the numerous snowstorms that took place between mid January and early April. When not plowing the roads, they were plowing back the snow banks to make room for any additional snowfalls. **Diligent Fremont snow-plowers did an exceptionally outstanding job throughout the Winter of 2015 and are to be commended for all their hard work.** People unfortunate to die during this severe winter often had poorly attended funerals due to the frigid cold and large snowfalls making it difficult to attend them. Valentine's Day dinner reservations at restaurants were either cancelled or postponed to a more suitable evening. Blizzard babies were born but making it to hospitals in time through snow-clogged streets did not make these births an easy accomplishment.

The relentless Winter of 2015 continued to drop large amounts of snow through most of March. The cold, frigid weather also continued unabated through much of March with only five

days hitting 40 degrees. High heating oil & propane prices also added much to the frustration and misery of this most difficult winter. The snow in Fremont did not melt completely until the end of April, and this author saw a pile of snow hidden under some hemlock trees in a hollow off Batchelder Road in Raymond as late as May 17th!!



Snow removal from the roof of the Safety Complex in February 2015. Photo Courtesy of Mary Wheaton-Pinder

April was still a fairly cold month, with little rain or snow, yet making people very anxious for spring to finally arrive. May proved extremely dry with little or no rain yet with moderate temperatures. **Fortunately, given the incredible amount of snowfall, snow melted so slowly that an expected spring-time flood did not occur.**

In Late January a Fremont family of six living on Riverside Drive fortunately escaped death when a snow-covered furnace vent caused deadly carbon-monoxide gas to build up inside the house. Thanks to a Carbon Monoxide Detector that had just had new batteries installed only a few hours before it went off, the family escaped the deadly menace and were sent to Portsmouth Hospital as a precaution and cleared and released.

Fremonters held their Deliberative Session on February 4 at the Ellis School Gym with 45 voters and 14 Town Officials in attendance. On March 10th Town Election Day voters were in a generous mood approving all but one of 17 Warrant Articles. At Town Elections former Police Chief Neal Janvrin was elected Town Selectman, and Leon Holmes, Jr. elected new Road Agent. Leon is the third member of the Holmes Family to hold that position and is performing his duties just as capably and competently as his father Leon Holmes Sr. and uncle Guerwood Holmes.

Eric Abney became the new Fremont Librarian in March succeeding Bethany Brace who resigned the position in November 2014. Eric worked as a very capable and competent bookstore manager for several years. Sadly, the popular Children's Librarian Lynda Miller passed away unexpectedly in May - a position she had held since 2002. Nancy Mason became her replacement and is filling big shoes very capably.

The 150th anniversary of the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865) took place on April 9,

2015. The historic surrender of the Confederate Army led by General Robert E. Lee to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia on April 9, 1865 was amazingly witnessed by Fremont soldier Samuel J. Willey--an extremely rare honor for our little town at such a historic event in American history! Willey later became the last surviving Civil War Soldier to die in Fremont -- dying July 17, 1927.

2015 also marked the 150th anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14th, 1865 at Ford's Theater in Washington City as it was called back then -- not D.C. Lincoln died the next morning at 7:22 am in the Peterson House across from Ford's Theater. Fremont native and future Rhode Island State Senator John Page Sanborn (born 1844 - died 1926) was in Washington City during the assassination and witnessed the exciting turmoil and confusion caused by the assassination. He had planned to go to Ford's Theater that night but because of a bad headache opted to stay in his hotel room until hearing all the excitement and commotion raging outside his hotel with people trying to find & capture the fleeing assassin John Wilkes Booth and his co-conspirators. Incredibly, Booth was dating, and engaged to a New Hampshire girl--Lucy Hale at the time of the assassination. She was the beautiful daughter of U.S. Senator John Parker Hale and they came from Dover, NH! They found Lucy's photo on Booth's dead body after he had finally been discovered hiding inside a torched tobacco barn. He was shot through the flames and died shortly afterwards on the porch of the nearby Garrett House on April 26, 1865 near Bowling Green, Virginia.

New Cemetery signs sponsored by the Fremont 250th Committee were erected in five Fremont Cemeteries on April 26th.

Fremont Police Patrolman/DARE Officer Greg Huard was honored in early 2015 and awarded for his many years of service to the Town of Fremont and its children through the DARE program.

Fremont Local TV Channel 22 began broadcasting on Cable Television in late 2014 and early 2015. Town resident Bruce White was instrumental in making this new service a reality for our town. Now, various public meetings and events are aired frequently so townspeople can take advantage of this service and know what is going on within the community.

May was the driest month in years here in New Hampshire. Drought conditions existed and fires were reported in several parts of the state. It finally rained on May 31st, June 1st & 2nd much to the delight of local officials. Warm springtime weather eluded the region for much of April no thanks to cool and sporadic chilly air afflicting most of the month.

In May Fremont resident David Doucette was riding his motorcycle with his wife Deborah on Route 111A in Exeter when a large owl with a three foot wingspan crashed into David's head and wrapped his wings around part of his neck and had a talon on his ear. Despite the sudden and unexpected force of the bird hitting his head, David was able to maintain control of the motorcycle and escaped with minor scratches and cuts to his neck and ear.

Fremont Police Chief Jon Twiss & Fremont Police Officer Derek Franek were honored at the *Manchester Union Leader* Hero Awards Banquet in May for their exceptional bravery during a May 12, 2014 Brentwood domestic disturbance that took the life of Police Officer Stephen Arkell. Franek barely escaped with his life after being fired upon by an assailant and was able to warn the Fremont Chief to not let other officers enter the booby trapped home which later exploded in a spectacular blaze thereby preventing further potential casualties.

A granite memorial bench honoring Mary Lucas, 52, who was sadly murdered in Fremont on October 16, 2014 was dedicated to her cheerful memory on a rainy Sunday, May 31st at the Joseph Bonis / Richard Stanley Memorial Ballfields. Thirty-five people attended including Mary's three grown children. They honored their mother in an impressive and honorable manner by keeping the event upbeat and positive. The event was covered statewide by WMUR-TV & WBIN-TV.

On June 7th Jessica McCassie, aged 19, of Fremont was killed in a car crash while driving eastbound on NH Route 101 in Candia. The promising young lady who graduated at the top of her high school class of 2014. She was in the National Honor Society and the Nute High School Student Council, and excelled in numerous sports. Sadly it was determined by doctors that she took heroin which contributed to her fatal automobile accident. Unfortunately, she became one of nearly 375 heroin overdose victims in NH during 2015.

In June, the *Manchester, NH Union Leader* reported that "Fremont resident Michael Porter strangled girlfriend Mary Lucas because he thought she was using him for his money" according to NH Attorney General's final report on the October 16 & 17, 2014 murder-suicide. Both Michael & Mary were congenial, good-natured, well-liked people, but sadly Michael left a suicide note explaining his insecurity within their relationship and he committed suicide the next morning on Jacob's Cove Road--less than a mile from where the murder took place on Main Street.

Ellis School Principal John Safina tendered his resignation at the end of June 2015. He had been a popular principal at Ellis School for six years.

There were two very serious car crashes on Beede Road, one in early June and another in late December. Fortunately there were no casualties.

It was most fitting that an unusual number of spectacular Fireworks were lighting up the skies all over Fremont on July 4th...a most suitable tribute on this the 240th anniversary year of the historic 1775 Battles of Lexington & Concord, Massachusetts, and the Battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill. July 4, 2016 marks the 240th Anniversary of American Independence.

August 1st Miss Ashley Buchanan was crowned Miss Fremont 2015 at a special ceremony held in the Fremont Meetinghouse. Miss Meghan Mission was runner-up. On June 20th Miss Tessa Donigian was crowned Little Miss Fremont at a pageant held at the Ellis School Gymnasium.

It was a very pleasant summer with just a few hot days in the 90's but for the most part

tolerable, comfortable days. It was again a very dry summer with hardly any rain even during September. Autumn proved to be one of the most colorful foliage seasons that this historian has seen in this region of New Hampshire in roughly 10 to 15 years.

A **Former Fremonter's Reunion** was held on September 26 at the home of Mark & Cheryl Woodman. Over 60 people who grew up in Fremont dating back to the 1920's came from all over the country to renew old ties and to enjoy tours of the Fremont Historical Museum and 1800 Meetinghouse. Fremont Pizzeria did a wonderful job of catering the event that was organized by Ms. Holly Durkee, formerly of Fremont and now of Maine. The event was inspired numerous members of the popular *website Fremont Kids Grown Up* which was started in early 2014. In the words of former Fremont newspaper correspondent Carrie Gove (1898-1990) who wrote Fremont town news columns for the Exeter Newsletter for over 50 years and who would often conclude her many town news columns by saying...***"a wonderful time was had by all."*** The 30th Annual Fremont Grass Drags & Water Crossing Competition took place over Columbus Day Weekend with 45,000 spectators attending this very popular event. Helicopter rides took place in conjunction with many other exciting activities including dirt bike aerial stunts that attract spectators from all over the country and Canada.

Thousands also attended the annual Soccer Tournament held on the Fremont-Epping town line off Shirking Road with participants and spectators coming from all over New England and New York State.

A lawsuit filed by Andrew Cullen of Dover for "false arrest" in 2011 against the Fremont Police Department seeking \$1.5 million was filed in Federal Court in October. In late November a Federal Judge dismissed the lawsuit without prejudice, saying "it would be best handled in a state court if Cullen chooses to pursue the matter further. In December he filed an appeal in the U.S. Court of Appeals.

The Wreaths Across America was held again on December 12th at the War Monument in front of the Fremont Town Hall. Christmas Wreaths are placed upon numerous veterans graves each December in various town cemeteries as a token of remembrance and appreciation. Local resident Gerry Tilley spearheads this event for both Fremont and East Kingston.

November & December were exceptionally warm months. Temperatures hovered between 45 to 65 degrees on nearly all days within that two month period except for the last four or five days in December when we had a slushy snowstorm on the 29th. It went down as the warmest December since weather records were first kept since 1871. Christmas Eve day temps reached 59 degrees in Fremont and 50 degrees on Christmas Day!

The Fremont Garden Club continues to do an outstanding job of keeping our town and its public buildings looking welcoming and festive during the various seasons and holidays. Thank-you for a job well done by this dedicated organization.

The Fremont Fire Rescue Department got its new fire truck this year. Congratulations to them

and the Town for investing in this much needed piece of equipment that will replace the out-dated 1980 fire truck.

In Memoriam -- We remember some longtime Fremont residents.

Alice E. Copp - aged 92 - died Feb. 21st. Alice was a true Yankee full of determination and good will and a hard work ethic. Her late husband William Copp was an old-time auctioneer before his death in 1966, and he and Alice operated *Bill's Lunch* across from the Spaulding & Frost Cooperage for several years in the 1950's and early 1960's.

Harold A. Davies - aged 91 - died March 6th. Harold has the distinction of being the **last surviving Fremont World War II veteran who actually still lived in, and served from Fremont!** He died 70 years after the end of World War II. Harold served several years on the Fremont Police & Fire Departments for many years and was the proud husband of Elizabeth (Bolduc) Davies for 63 years. Mildred (Emerson) Frye is the last surviving native WWII veteran that served from Fremont. She has not lived in Fremont for many years.

Betty J. Walker - aged 89 - died May 25th. Betty and her husband of 65 years Byron Walker, were popular residents of Fremont operating for many years in the 1950's Walker's Turkey Farm and later in the 1960's Walker's Horse-Riding Stables from their Main Street home which was in the Smith-Walker Family for 191 (1809-2000) years making it the second oldest house in Fremont still owned by the same family. The house was built in 1774 by Nicholas Gordon Jr. Betty was a cheerful, thoughtful, caring mother of six children.

Cecelia L. O'Connell - aged 96 - died July 12th. Cecelia moved to Fremont in 1955 and served the town enthusiastically as a Deputy Town Clerk; and was a reliable member of the Fremont PTA, Fremont Grange, Fremont 200th & 225th Anniversary Committees. In 1912 she became the next Fremont Boston Post Cane holder -- a distinguished honor in over 400 New England towns dating back to 1909. She was married to the late James O'Connell - Fremont's popular Postmaster for 32 years.

Meredith A. Bolduc -- aged 70 - died October 10th. Meredith "Chickee" Bolduc served the Town of Fremont for over 40 years on a variety of town boards most notably on the Planning, Zoning, & Land Use Boards. She served as Deputy Town Clerk and kept the minutes for numerous Selectmen's Meetings. She was a longtime member of the Fremont Old Home Day Committee. She and husband Jesse were active in working the popular Deerfield Fair Horse-pulling Competitions. Her cheerful demeanor, hard-work ethic, and love for Fremont & family will long be remembered by countless people who cherished her friendship.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew E. Thomas
Town Historian