

Report of the Town Historian ~ Fremont In Review 2020

Well, 2020 has certainly been a year to remember...or better yet, one to forget! There has not been a year quite like this one since the US entered World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. At that time, Americans suddenly had to mobilize a war effort and do it fast! Planes, bombs, ships, military vehicles, look-out towers, railroads, all had to be built or safeguarded from sabotage...not to mention having to deal with rationing of certain foods, gasoline, meats, and other essentials of daily living. People were encouraged to grow their own small gardens called Victory Gardens to help with feeding families, neighbors, and armies. The World War II era WASN'T an easy time to live through to say the least... unfortunately, neither has 2020.

2020 has been filled with an almost inexhaustible number of trying trials and travesties. Here we were, in the middle of a hotly contested Presidential Election Year, in a deeply politically divided nation...the likes of which have been unknown since the Civil War years of 1861 to 1865. Political, racial, economic, and natural disasters were all combining to create an unsettling, insecure sense of abnormality. It felt like the very fabric of America was rapidly ripping apart especially in our dialogue with one another... all because too many Americans refuse to listen to, or respect the opinions of others, be they friends, family, co-workers, or the like. Sadly, what many people fail to realize or understand is this... we are setting ourselves up for considerable misery yet to come. We are ripping our nation apart over what can be considered in retrospect, mostly asinine, ridiculous, overly proud & hot-headed political and personal opinions -- all because personal pride dictates beliefs more often than not, factual, thoughtful, or logical thinking.

We are NOT the only country on earth that has faults and weaknesses...ALL nations do! Thus, once we pig-headedly destroy the American fabric of democratic ideals & constitutional principles...then and only then, will we suddenly realize, just how valuable and meaningful all our freedoms, dreams, goals, and personal well-being truly was! We Americans are walking a very dangerous and slippery slope. We MUST learn to become more understanding, respectful, tolerant, compassionate, compromising, civic-minded...and definitely more neighborly to one another.

Different personal, political, religious, and individual perspectives are what actually ENRICH and ENHANCE our lives. They give us additional insight, knowledge, and wisdom in addressing countless social, economic, environmental, & political issues that hopefully, will allow us to achieve more lasting and equitable results. If we don't, we are foolishly asking for, and deserving more pain and suffering than our short lives on this planet truly warrant or deserve.

Fremonters can be very proud of how they handled many challenges in 2020. Town officials stepped up to the plate, along with numerous townspeople, who did what had to be done to minimize and safeguard townspeople from the dangers of contracting the Corona-virus a.k.a. COVID-19. Our town of roughly 4,800 residents was doing very well in controlling the infection rate since mid-March when many had to stop going to work, school, etcetera to quarantine in

hopes of preventing a large outbreak from occurring. Fremont recorded its first Covid-19 infection on April 6th. At that time the state had over 700 infections and 13 deaths as of April 7th. By April 16th, the state infection rate had increased to 1,211, with 34 deaths. All was going pretty good until Memorial Day weekend when many people started easing up on the recommended protective measures. In fairness, there also were too many contradictory and confusing safety measures. Also, there were too many Americans that didn't believe they would contract the virus, or simply didn't care how their actions impacted others around them. Consequently, as of November & December 2020, we are in the midst of an all out "war" trying to contain the exploding numbers of Americans coming down with, or dying from the virus. As of December 31st, there are 140 Fremonters that have, or had, the virus. We know at this time, at least one Fremonter has died from the virus. Given that New Hampshire had lost well over 740 people by the end of December, it is only realistic to assume that at least a few more have died in Fremont from the COVID-19.

The pandemic has had a severe impact on daily life here in Fremont and elsewhere. The Town has made available two MASK TREES (unique to Fremont) at the Town Hall & Safety Complex where residents could obtain free masks to wear over their faces during the pandemic. Many townspeople graciously made these numerous masks for free to give to fellow townspeople... especially when store bought ones were so hard to come by.

Amazingly, in the early months of the pandemic, traffic on town roads was practically non-existent...almost to the point that the town, like others, seemed like a ghost-town. Even Routes 101 & 125 were extremely desolate for days on end. Everyday seemed almost like an old-fashioned Sunday morning when nearly everyone stayed home or went to church... therefore barely any traffic on locals roads & highways from mid-March to mid-May.

People were staying home and off the streets pretty dutifully for the first month and a half or so when schools & businesses were shut down because of the virus. It was also hard to purchase necessary household items at numerous stores due to a "run on stores." The following items: Lysol or Clorox wipes, masks, toilet paper, bleach, hand sanitizer, water, macaroni, detergent, dog & cat food, cat litter, etcetera were all hard to come by early in the beginning of the virus outbreak. Social-distancing became the new "catch-phrase" and visiting with friends, families, neighbors, and so on took on risks of their own if one didn't keep six feet apart, and socialize in only very small gatherings. Needless to say, these recommended rules seriously impacted countless businesses, social events, indoor & outdoor activities, and required new and safer ways, to sell products and to conduct town business. In mid-March most businesses had to close down for weeks until the state allowed certain businesses to reopen. The Fremont town hall had to resort to conducting various town services to over the phone, on the computer, or via mail. That is still the case as of the end of 2020. Fremont also had to cancel Memorial Day 2020 for the first time since the town held the first one in 1879. Despite the cancellation, the 1800 Meetinghouse was decorated with patriotic bunting and white battery-operated solar candles in the windows to show our Veterans that Fremonters had not forgotten them. American flags were placed upon telephone poles between Beede Road & the Village Cemetery, as well as on veteran graves. Wreaths were

placed in front of the Town Hall War Monument and at the Philip Pratt Memorial Park. This is the worst pandemic to strike the U.S. since the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918/19 which killed an estimated 50,000,000+ people worldwide. Six Fremonters died of the Spanish Flu back then.

People's United Methodist Church had to conduct services via YouTube. Weddings, funerals, wakes, baptisms, & burials had to be postponed, delayed, or not held at all. Even with that, most church events had to take place outside. Reverend Frank King was kept busy trying to provide spiritual support for those members impacted one way or another by the pandemic.

Ellis School and high school students had to both learn remotely, attend smaller downsized classes, erect cafeteria safety barriers, seat students further apart on buses, eliminate certain sports, school plays, class trips, dances, and most distressingly, restructure Graduation ceremonies. Typical graduation ceremonies could not be held in 2020, so local high school graduates had picture posters with their names on them posted in front of their homes all around town. Later in summer, there was a socially distant, outdoor video Graduation Ceremony occurring from parked cars at Sanborn Regional High School in Kingston.

The Fremont Library under the able leadership of Eric Abney & staff had to resort to curbside delivery of books to patrons until the State said that was no longer a safe measure. Fremont Police had to institute safety measures to keep a certain distance from certain policing matters. The same for the ever diligent Fremont Fire Rescue Department... especially when they had to fight a garage & house fire in November. Fremont EMT's are at even more danger of course, so they too, have to implement even more safety measures to prevent contracting the virus. These are just a few of the many different measures that have changed life as we once knew it here in Fremont and elsewhere around the country. Hopefully the COVID-19 Vaccines will help us eventually return to our once "normal lives." Currently, area hospitals are struggling under enormous stress due to the shortage of hospital beds due to the increasing number of patients, overworked doctors, nurses & other essential infected patients, concerned relatives, keeping adequate supplies stocked, sanitizing "everything" in a hospital, and administering oxygen, ecetera, one suddenly believes in, and appreciates "angels" on this earth.

Both the SB2 Deliberative Session & Annual School District Meeting took place at the Ellis School on Saturday, February 1st with 60 people in attendance including town officials. Annual Town Election Day took place on Tuesday, March 10th. Voters approved all but three of the 22 warrant articles. Gene Cordes successfully ran for another term as Selectman against Venus Woods...a virtual unknown to most town voters. Gene has the distinction of being the longest serving Selectmen in Fremont history - 26 years!

The Drought of 2020 impacted much of New England with southeastern New Hampshire carrying the brunt of it. It was a hot late spring & summer with only a spattering of brief downpours occurring through mid-summer. The autumn was dry as well and the drought continued to get progressively worse throughout the rest of the year...even into December, though it finally improved a little after a snowstorm or two. Christmas Day it rained heavily and

that downpour helped ease up on low well water concerns since the ground was still not frozen very much. This was the worse Drought to hit the town since 2016, 1965 & 1957.

Melissa Ann Nolet, aged 34, died April 23rd after suffering from prolonged injuries sustained in an ATV accident on the Rockingham Recreational Trail in Sandown in 2018.

Two Brookline, NH women were seriously injured on May 31st after rolling an ATV on the Rockingham Recreational Trail. Both were thrown off the vehicle after veering off the trail and it flipping upon them causing serious, but non-life-threatening injuries. They were taken to Elliott Hospital in Manchester.

2020 marked the 100th Anniversary of Women getting the Right To Vote in 1920. The FIRST woman to win any elective office in Fremont was MARY ALICE BEEDE in 1924 as the first elected female Town Treasurer. It wasn't until 1966 that Pearl Davies became the first appointed Selectwoman to fill the remainder of her late husbands' term. The first elected female Fremont State Representative was Bonnie Danforth in 1971.

Melissa Gates, daughter of Donald & Marilyn Gates was inadvertently left out of last years Fremont Year-In-Review. She had the distinction of being awarded the JOHN ALDEN SOCIETY WOMAN LEADERSHIP AWARD in May 2019. Melissa is to be commended for achieving this outstanding honor.

TROPICAL STORM ISAIAS took place on Tuesday, August 4 with only a short one-hour downpour of rain with winds gusting to 45 to 50 miles per hour. Only a few trees and branches fell, with a few causing power-outages around various parts of town into the next day. Damage in Fremont and other seacoast area towns was very minimal compared to other sections of New Hampshire and New England. Heavy rains, flooding, tornadoes, and high winds caused considerable damage along other parts of the Eastern Seaboard from Massachusetts down to Florida.

The Autumn Foliage was spectacular in Fremont this year...possibly due to the severe lack of rainwater this year. It seemed that nearly every tree in town was ablaze in bright colors. The annual Columbus Day Weekend Fremont Grass Drags & annual Spring Renaissance Faire, both held at the Brookvale Farm on Martin Road, were cancelled due to the pandemic.

CURRIER LANE off South Road was carved out and paved starting in early July 2020. This new road was constructed right over the ancient 1750 John Clough cellar-hole that formerly sat atop the little knoll that the new road goes over...about 225 feet off South Road. Currier Lane took its name from the old 1778 Timothy Currier & 1882 Perley Currier homes that still stand on South Road just west of this new 55+ Housing Development.

Fremont Pizzaria added an impressive outdoor deck in mid-summer with several tables covered with umbrellas for outdoor dining ...as a result of the limited indoor dining arrangements caused by the State Pandemic rules and regulations.

Five new business units will be added in late 2020 or early 2021 onto Cooper's Plaza on Spaulding Road creating an L-Shaped Plaza. Cooper's Plaza was built in 2007.

Real Estate sales of homes in Fremont became extremely brisk in 2020. Many homes around town sold above the asking price with only a few taking less than the asking price. The Real Estate market was on fire in New Hampshire...partly due to low interest rates, and buyers coming from New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts & New Jersey trying to escape the high Covid-19 infection rates in those states. What is amazing about this phenomena is that Fremont had one of the highest property tax rates in southern New Hampshire through most of the year until the town re-evaluation lowered it from \$31.05 per thousand down to \$23.13 in November. Once a fairly affordable town, Fremont real estate now sells easily in the \$300,000 to \$700,000+ price frame. This is partly due to Fremont being ideally located within 25 miles from the ocean; easy accessibility to major interstate highways; only 46 miles to Boston; half-way between Manchester & Portsmouth; and easy access to the White Mountains and Lakes Region. Fremont - Old Poplin - is a quaint old New England town with considerable architectural character and charm. Hard to believe that less than 275 years ago, Fremont was just a frontier town in the backwoods of Exeter and pretty much off the beaten trail. In 1767 Poplin had 521 people. In 2020 Fremont now has close to 5,000 residents...a number that many old-time Fremonters just 25 years ago never thought possible for many more decades to come.

Halloween was not sanctioned in Fremont in 2020. We were the only town in the region to not recommend observing Trick-or-Treating. This of course, did not stop that from happening, but the official town position erred on the side of caution given the rapidly increasing pandemic levels, thus to many, this was a sensible safety precaution to take. As of October 30th there were 36 Covid-19 infections in Fremont, and the national rate of infections had increased to 8,000,000 cases, and 225,000 deaths.

2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION took place with extraordinary safety measures being implemented for the well-being of Fremont voters. The election took place on Tuesday, November 3rd and witnessed again the largest voter turnout in Town history. 2,870 registered Fremont voters out of 3,961 cast ballots amounting to a 73% voter turn-out. Republican Donald J. Trump received 1,625 votes compared to Democratic candidate Joseph Biden receiving 1,151 votes. Considering the intense political climate this year, and that 243 new voters registered to vote on Election Day...Trump only received 44 additional votes than he received in Fremont in 2016 with 1,581. Compare this with the Democratic increase of 186 more votes than they received in 2016 with 965 votes. President Trump lost New Hampshire by roughly 2,900 votes in 2016, in 2020 he lost the state by over 58,000 votes. New Hampshire is still very much a purple state, that can become a toss-up state either way regardless of Republican or Democratic. The last time New Hampshire cast its presidential votes for a Republican was in 2000 when it voted for George W. Bush over Democrat Al Gore. Long voter lines in Fremont wrapped all the way around from the Pettingill Gymnasium to the front of the Ellis School for the entire day between 7:00 am until 8:00 pm. Voters in Fremont were polite and respectful despite waiting up to 30 to 45 minutes in line to vote. Considering the rabid-like

presidential campaign of 2020, Americans around the nation were very civil and good-natured during the Election day process. They had to wait for official election day results for another four days before a winning candidate was declared -- that being Joe Biden.

In November, Fremont town fathers placed a controversial weight limit on Shirkin(g) & Rogers Roads because of considerable road damage caused by heavy trucks & traffic by several large businesses on the Epping end of Shirking Road. Fremont felt that Epping officials were ignoring or downplaying our legitimate concerns regarding wear & tear on our town roads, yet Fremont gets no financial benefit in the form of business taxes to offset the road repairs. Epping is now suddenly recognizing the same concerns on their roads now that heavy vehicles have to use Epping roads instead to access Route 101 rather than the short-cut through Fremont.

Thanksgiving & Christmas in 2020 were considerably different than in years past. Many typical holiday events were cancelled, downsized, quieter and as a result of the pandemic much more subdued. Santa made his annual Christmas Parade visit on December 19th. He also made a special appearance at the Ellis School on December 5th where locals could see him as they drove around the school parking lot. Thanks to the Fremont Fire, Police, & Recreation Department for coordinating these holiday events. The stately-looking 1800 Meeting House was illuminated for the Christmas season with white battery-operated solar lights for the second year in a row. Also the Town Christmas tree in front of the Safety Complex was lit up as it has been for the past ten or more years.

Fremont saw a considerable increase of Covid-19 infections just before and after Thanksgiving. The same is happening again after Christmas. Let's hope & pray that these two special holidays will be much more happier and healthier in years to come.

A very special book was published by Nancy (Frye) Bergeron this year titled: "Norine - Living A New England Century." This is an insightful and heartwarming story told by Norines' grand-daughter Nancy as if Norine Emerson was telling it to you herself. She relates what it was like to live in small-town Fremont, and learning to survive, struggle, endure, cherish, and appreciate living 100 years in this quaint old New England town.

Norine (Clement) Emerson was born in December 1900 and died in March 2001 at age 100. For those longtime residents of Fremont who remember Norine and her husband Freeman, this is a must read book about a truly sweet and remarkable lifelong Fremonter. If you appreciate local history then this is a book you will thoroughly enjoy.

The former Liberty Square Market 2001 to 2020-formerly Bosworth's Market -1996 to 1998, and before that Vining's Market - 1962 to 1996, was sold in November 2020 and is currently being renovated and upgraded so it can reopen as the 1820 Country Store & Deli in early 2021. George Maihos is the new owner. We wish him great success and a profitable tenure in this 200 year old country store built in 1820.



A special word of Thanks to the Fremont Garden Club and associates that so generously replaced the Welcome to Fremont sign posts in accordance to NH State Highway specifications. The Garden Club continues to enhance the aesthetic beauty of Fremont with their seasonal & holiday floral & greenery decorations. Thanks for making Fremont look so welcoming!

To this author's great disappointment, after taking a summer hike out into Shirking Woods off the Shirking Road (west of Beede Road), he discovered that the huge Lyford's Boulder "disappeared!" It formerly stood 2 ½ tenths of a mile northeast of the intersection of Squire Spring where the unpaved section of

(New) Shirkin(g) Road (built circa 1836), and where the Old Shirkin(g) Road (built circa 1753 & now called Squire Road since 1995) intersect out in Shirking Woods--west of where the former Compost / Rock Crushing businesses were, or still are. This impressive boulder named after the proud old Lyford Family that lived in Poplin as early as the 1750's, measured 20 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 18 feet high. After scouring a huge geographical area, this author could not find what happened to this landmark boulder...one of the largest erratic boulders in southeastern New Hampshire. Judging from the considerable land clearing and several crushed rock piles located off Shirking Road, the author has to assume that the boulder was unceremoniously reduced to tiny pieces of rock! This is a terrible loss to the early & natural history of Fremont -- Old Poplin. It is believed that this boulder was originally part of Mt. Pawtuckaway and dislodged by the massive glaciers that covered much of North America some 12,000 years ago.

Bobcats, bear, moose, deer, coyotes, eagles & turkeys, were all seen often roaming the woods, fields, swamps, brooks and rivers around Fremont this year.

IN MEMORIAM Fremont lost some longtime, dedicated townspeople during 2020. Among them are:

DAVID LAFAYETTE, aged 83, died July 11th. Dave was the former owner of Vining's Market between 1976 and 1983. He continued and enhanced the tradition of the store being a very popular meat-market destination for customers far and wide who enjoyed their meats cut to special order by experienced meat butchers. Anyone still remember old Jimmy Belmont? Everyone loved Jimmy who often smoked his pipe while cutting huge slabs of meat to order! Those were the days!! Dave went on to build, open and operate the popular Yankee Meat Markets in Stratham & Raymond between 1983 to 2002. He also ran unsuccessfully for the NH State Senate from Fremont in 1984. Dave formerly worked for the Federal government in the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, D.C. for 15 years before deciding to get out of the government rat-race and buy a small-town country store in Fremont.

RICHARD C. HESELTON, aged 83, died August 21st. Richard was a lifelong resident of Fremont whose ancestors in town dated back to the mid-1850's. He served in the Air Force in the mid-

1950's and afterwards, worked in, and later owned & operated the long-time family business called Fremont Motor Sales (started circa 1938 by his father Frank Carroll Heselton) until circa 2010. He served as a longtime Rockingham County Deputy Sheriff dating back to circa 1963; was a member of the Fremont Fire Department practically his entire life, becoming Fire Chief in 1976 and holding that position for 32 years until 2008. He diligently served the town, county, & state in many other worthy capacities through the years. He left behind his lifelong friend and companion Betty (Bassett) Stanley and her three children. His late wife Elaine (Margelot) Heselton, and their two children Stephen & Kathy (Heselton) LaRoche, all preceded him in death. Dick was a "larger-than-life" figure in Fremont who will not be forgotten for many years to come.



PHYLLIS "TEET" (BURLEIGH) BOLDUC, aged 95, died November 12th. Phyllis better known as "Teet" was another longtime resident of Fremont whose Burleigh relatives first came to town in 1904. Though "Teet" moved just over the Fremont border in Raymond in 1974, she and her late husband Joseph G. Bolduc, Sr. will ALWAYS be considered lifelong Fremont residents. Teet was born and raised in Fremont in 1925 and married Joseph Bolduc, Sr. in 1943. Together they raised a "brood" of nine children, all of whom have gone out into the world and in one way or another, have made successes of themselves in a variety of admirable ways. "Teet" loved country music and happily sang for many years with her brother Robert and dear friend Jeannette Currier in the well-known Country Roads Band. They sang and performed all around the region for many years, and though the band disbanded many years ago, "Teet" never stopped happily singing for her family right up until the end of her long life. Her dedication to being a hardworking, no nonsense "of old-time Yankee stock," -- yet an extremely devoted & loving wife, mother, grandmother, and friend to many, was what made her incredibly special and greatly admired. She drove a school bus for 27 years in Fremont and never had an accident. She was so considerate that when she saw a short line of cars lined up behind her school bus, she would pull off the road so they could pass by and not be "stuck" behind a bus for miles on end. These are the type of qualities that make for a highly respected, admired, and appreciated person -- Phyllis was that type of person.

BARBARA I. (BURLEIGH) ROBINSON - aged 86, died January 17th. Barbara was also born and raised in Fremont and was a lifelong resident. She was Phyllis (Burleigh) Bolduc's younger sister. The Burleigh Family dates back to 1904 in Fremont. Barbara was the devoted wife to Maurice Robinson for just shy of 70 years - one of the longest lasting marriages in Fremont history! Together they raised four children who have all led happy,



productive, meaningful lives. Barbara & Maurice bought and remodeled the former one-room 1851 Primary Schoolhouse on Beede Road in 1950 which is located a few feet north of the 1895 one-room Grammar Schoolhouse/ now Fremont Historical Museum. Here they lived their entire married life. Barbara was a delightful, good-natured, hard-working person who worked for years at the historic 1874 Spaulding & Frost Cooperage - who took great pride in learning and excelling in the various processes of wooden barrel-making.

PEARL M. (DAVIS) HOLMES - aged 78, died June 6th. Pearl was another lifelong Fremonter whose family in town dated back to circa 1940. She was a very hard working, conscientious wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and employee wherever she worked. Like many old-time residents of Fremont, Pearl worked at the historic 1874 Spaulding & Frost Cooperage for many years and like everything else she did, proved a very competent, capable, and dependable employee. Her family was her #1 priority and she did everything possible to help them succeed. Pearl enjoyed leading a quiet, yet purposeful, meaningful life. She was married to Leon Holmes Sr. for over 60 years.

PEARL E. (ADAMS) GAGNON - aged 97, died May 7th. Married to Arthur A. Gagnon in 1944, she & Art lived in the house they built at that time where they raised their four children. She & Arthur owned & operated ART'S DAIRY from 1965 until 1979. Pearl had a quick wit, kind nature, and loving devotion to her family & friends. She enjoyed singing songs that reminded her of her youth--especially country music songs. Fremont has lost another down-to-earth, caring Fremonter that walked the walk of life most admirably.

THANKS & APPRECIATION TO ALL
FREMONTERS...

It goes without saying, that this historian who has been a part of Fremont since 1960, sincerely appreciates and honors the many wonderful people of Fremont that do SO much to make this a great



town to live in. THANK-YOU to one and all in Fremont who give so much of themselves in countless large & small ways. Your contributions ARE appreciated despite the ever-changing world we live in. Let's all hope that 2021 will be a much happier, healthier, and cohesive year where we ALL continue to work together for the common good of our town, state, & nation. HAPPY 2021 TO ONE & ALL!

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew E. Thomas
Fremont Historian

Photos courtesy of Mary Kaltenbach and Heidi Carlson