

The History Corner: #24
Does Anyone Remember “the Grove” Behind the Town House?

At the recent Old Home Day (thank you so much to all those who volunteered and who participated in this glorious annual event!) long-time New Hampton Village resident June Smith was struck with a childhood memory. In her own words:

I recall running with young relatives and friends back and forth on top of plank seating in “the Grove,” down back of the Town House. We ran along two inch thick boards – ten to twelve feet long – laid on top of tree stumps on either side of an aisle. The aisle led to steps up to a large stage, about twenty feet wide and ten deep. The whole area was an outdoor auditorium. Following the afternoon meal everyone would gather in the Grove to hear a political speaker or two, followed by entertainment including music.

June then wondered if anyone else could recall the particulars of the Grove and the activities there – or, even better, if photographs and printed programs could be found. She visited the Gordon-Nash Library and asked if we knew more. We sent out an email to some members of the New Hampton Historical Society and both Bob and Tom Smith recalled the Grove. Bob remembered playing on the stage – a wooden platform – which rotted away as the years passed. He also recalled the plank seating was not in the best condition. Tom saw a photo of it once and has been on the lookout for it ever since.

We were able to find a number of articles about the use of the Grove at Old Home Day in the newly digitized version of *The Bristol Enterprise*.^{*} On September 2, 1937, an article on Old Home Day, reported:

At the grove, E. McMann, a teacher of tap dancing, exhibited his pupils in military, waltz, soft shoe, buck rhythm clog, waltz clog, rhythm buck dances. Those who danced were Elinor and Alice Piche, Aileen Boombower, Rita Cote, Robert Hart, John Glines, Jr., Anita Le Pierre, Earl N. Stokes, Lorraine Fogg, Shirley McFarland, Henry Nault, Rita Boingault, Virginia Patten, and Violet Cormier. Songs were rendered by Alfred Jeffers, Dorothy Gilman, Andrew Bushee, Ellon Gilman; speakers on this program were Col. Charles Hoyt, president of the State Old Home association, Dr. James Shaw of Franklin, and Miss Ina Bickford read an essay on “The History of Old Home Day.” Baked beans and coffee were served at noon. At 3 p.m. a ball game was in order...

A recent visit to the heavily wooded area in back of the Town House revealed lots of rotting stumps, but most likely those are from, as Tom Smith observed, a timber cut done about twenty years ago to remove a number of old pine trees. If anyone has more information on “the Grove” or a photo or two of it, please let us know and we can share in a subsequent “History Corner.”

^{*}We are so grateful to the Minot-Sleeper Library (Bristol) for digitizing every issue of *The Bristol Enterprise* from 1870 through 1989 (in all its various names and formats). This archive provides an extraordinary resource to the life and times of our area for 120 years, and it available to all for free.

Stay tuned for times when the Gordon-Nash Library will offer tutorials on how to search the archive, as you will not be disappointed. Here is a link to the site: <https://bristolnh.advantage-preservation.com/home>

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Page from *The Bristol Enterprise* of Sept 2, 1937

For more information on the history of the town, please visit the newly updated New Hampton Historical Society website at <https://www.newhamptonhistory.org/> If you have memories, photos or information on “the Grove,” please share them with me at kbicknell@newhampton.org

Kent Bicknell

Historian, NHHS

Curator of Special Collections

The Gordon-Nash Library at New Hampton School

September 5th, 2022