

# WESTMORLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thanks to the work of our dedicated volunteers, Board Committees, and our Museum Manager/Curator and his staff, the 2017 season was again outstanding—with an impressive calendar of events, a fitting tribute to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Keillor House.

At our AGM on May 17<sup>th</sup> two Board Members Crystal Grant and Kathy Bowser, retired. I want to thank Crystal for serving as Treasurer and staying on after stepping down as Treasurer, in spite of her schedule. Kathy has served three terms and 'according to the by-laws' I must step down—but I hope she will rejoin us soon. Many of you may not know of Kathy's tireless work over many months helping to refurbish the apartments at the Bell Inn. Without Bob and Kathy's commitment, the job couldn't have been done! Thank you both.

Jeff Hovey and Margaret Eaton have agreed to join the Board. Margaret will,

we hope, continue to spearhead the 'Wall of Fame' project which salutes outstanding New Brunswickers with a connection to Dorchester or Westmorland. Jeff has recently moved to Dorchester, and in spite of undertaking restoration of historic 'Maplehurst' with Marisca, has agreed to become our Treasurer. Jeff is an accountant with his own business and his financial experience should be of great value to the Society.

The Speaker at our AGM was our Secretary, Judy Morison, (someone I know *fairly* well) who described an exciting initiative she is involved with—the NB Mat Registry, which is documenting (stories, images) the historic mats of New Brunswick. This documentation will be available as a Virtual Exhibit hosted by the Registry's partner, the New Brunswick Museum. (For details, see The New Brunswick Mat Registry website

([www.mats-tapisnb.com](http://www.mats-tapisnb.com)). Thank you, Judy, for introducing us to this exciting project.

### *Financial Profile*

Our finances continued to be positive this year. Fund-Raising increased 27% to \$14,400, and donations were up 134% to \$20,517. The fair market value of the Graydon Milton Fund increased 12% or \$31,814. Net assets increased \$28,971 to \$1,317,685. (The Balance Sheet and Consolidated Statement of Operations for 2017 are available on-line—for a hard copy, contact our Secretary.)

### *Membership and Newsletter*

We currently have 213 members – 28 Institutional (including the Yale Library), 95 Individual and Family, 73 Life Members and 17 Honorary Members. Our membership is our support base—and our future, so please en-

## KEILLOR HOUSE MUSEUM —SPECIAL EVENTS

### **Canada Day-Dorchester Veterans' Centre**

July 1, 1:00-3:00

*Special music and entertainment, children's games, cake and ice cream.*

*Keillor House and St. James Museums tours available 10:00 to 12:00 and 3:00 to 5:00.*

### **Sandpiper Festival Breakfast-Keillor House**

July 28 7:30-10:30 am

*Pancakes, sausages, beans, &c. \$7.00*

### **Heritage Fair**

*Demonstrations of carding, spinning, weaving, & other traditional skills,*

506-379-6633  
[www.keillorhousemuseum.com](http://www.keillorhousemuseum.com)

### **Dinner with the Keillors-Keillor House Museum**

Sept. 22 6:00 pm

*Join us for a Yorkshire-inspired dining experience that you will not soon forget. Wine included. Reservations required*

\$25.00

506-379-6633

[www.keillorhousemuseum.com](http://www.keillorhousemuseum.com)

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## REMEMBERING SYLVIA

In the last issue of the Newsletter we informed you of the death of Sylvia Yeoman, one of the founders and longstanding pillars of WHS, and promised an article commemorating her enormous contribution to the Society for this issue.

There is no better way to begin than by re-reading the article her daughter Katie published in the February 2016 issue entitled “Katie’s Memories: A Rocklyn Girl’s Retrospective on the Early Years of WHS.” If you can’t find your old Newsletters, simply go to the Keillor House website and click on “Newsletters” at the bottom of the homepage. I strongly urge that you do this before proceeding here—and while you are at it, briefly review “The Acquisition and Restoration of Keillor House: Our First “Megaproject” in the September 2015 issue.

Assuming you have finished at least the first assignment, let’s summarize some of its important points before going on to hear from another witness to Sylvia’s magnificent achievements, namely her protégée and successor in so many ways, Alice Folkins—our Alice.

Sylvia and her husband Mark were not simply founding members of WHS in the sense that they were among those that attended the Charter Meeting on November 7, 1960. They had both been intensely interested in local history ever since moving to Moncton soon after their marriage in 1952, where they became enthusiastic attenders of informal gatherings that met to discuss ways to preserve that history, and that later became the nucleus of the new Society. Their passion for the past took on concrete (or perhaps better to say ‘masonry’) form in 1959 when they moved to Dorchester and bought Edward Barron Chandler’s once-splendid but then sadly deteriorated stone mansion, ‘Rocklyn’, and embarked on a decades-long restoration project that would help to prepare Sylvia for her role in the restoration of Keillor House. (Mark had known the house in its better days, having visited there with his mother and father, the rector of Holy Trinity Anglican Church during the 1930s, and dreamed of living in it someday.) Being of an exceedingly generous and hospitable nature, the Yeomans opened their door to all who were interested in the house and it soon became a popular venue for meetings, fashion shows and other fundraising events in support of the fledgling WHS.

A particularly memorable example was the “Centennial Tea and Fashion Show” put on in the summer of 1964 to raise money for Centennial projects. (One of them would be the restoration of Keillor House, although this was not known at the time.) The tea (organized by Sylvia) was a spectacular success, not least because a group of enthusiastic volunteers of all ages modeled the already impressive collection of clothes that had been donated to the Society in the magnificently authentic setting of Rocklyn. “What a display they made!” Katie (who was one of the models) remembered. “We swept down the broad staircase in our satin and velvet and lace, as music played and the guests oohed and aahed.” This was just the first in a series of similar events—some of them at-



tended by over two hundred people—that continued into the 1980s, drawing much favourable attention to the good work of WHS, and Sylvia was at the very centre of all of them. Another memorable tea, planned for five hundred guests and complete with a specially prepared skit of “The Keillor Family of 1813,” took place on June 3, 1967 as part of the opening ceremonies of Keillor House Museum, then called the Westmorland Centennial Museum. This reminds us of Sylvia’s central role in WHS’s first, largest, and most continuing restoration project—still the “centre of our being” today.

As described in the article on the acquisition and restoration of Keillor House, Sylvia was the ‘Chairman’ of the Museum Committee that assumed general guidance of the project. Of course there were many other heroes of this great endeavour, but Sylvia was among the brightest of its guiding lights, drawing not only on her experience in restoring Rocklyn but also her knowledge of local artifacts, which she began collecting even before the museum was opened. Many of them came from guests and visitors who had enjoyed the Yeomans’ hospitality at Rocklyn. To ensure that they were properly cared for, she attended a number of workshops in museum management put on by the Atlantic Museums Association and became our first Museum Manager. But it didn’t stop there. After the museum was up and running there were still fundraising events to organize, teas to host, fashion shows to put on—and a myriad of other things too numerous to list. Again, she was at the centre of all of them. She had become, and would long remain, one of the main pillars of WHS.

courage family and friends to join—or give a membership for a birthday gift or Christmas present. (Gift Certificates are available.) Membership Forms are available at the Keillor House or from Judy at 379-6682.

Just another ‘thank you’ to Gene for his editorship of the Newsletter—and for his and Jamie’s research into so many areas of interest to our members. Gene’s professionalism and dedication are widely respected across the province, and have provided remarkable insight into many important topics for which we have scant record. We appreciate your hard work.

#### *Properties Update*

Capital expenses and repairs this year were unusually high. At the Bell Inn these included a chimney rebuild, repairs to the stone foundation and installation of additional steps from Cape Road, a new safety fence and walkway. A new oil tank was mandated by our insurance company. We also had unusual expenses for appliance replacement at the Landry House: we needed new stoves and refrigerators, a new dryer and new foam and fibreglass insulation in the basement. In the Payzant building three new windows needed to be installed, along with new window frames, trim, and some siding replacement. We are continuing to refurbish the new apartment in the Landry House and expect to finish the project over the summer.

In 2018 two new businesses will open in the Bell Inn: *Natshi Designs* (Shirley MacDowall), will serve the quilting and crafts community, and *Ketchup With That* (Mary Gillespie), will be offering catering services, bake goods and ‘food to go’. (See p.16)

#### *Upcoming Activities*

Be sure to mark June 9<sup>th</sup> on your calendar—our Opening, and tour our special exhibit ‘Your Smart Phone’, an innovative look at the objects that have been or can be, replaced by a smart phone. You’ll be surprised!

The ‘Keillor Hearth Cooking’ experience (18th century cooking methods) is now open for reservations. Contact Donald at 379-6633 to reserve your place. This workshop has been extensively researched by Donald and Gene, and offers a fascinating, ‘hands-on’ experience utilizing traditional cooking skills and methods perfected over time.

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Thanks again to all our volunteers. Your willingness to take the time to make a difference, makes it possible to keep our museums active and vital institutions. Well done!

*Cole Morison*

Speaking of fashion shows, Sylvia was an expert in designing and making costumes, having studied Fine Arts at Mount Allison and Boston and fashion and custom design in London, and she imparted many of her skills to protégées who would go on to make their own important contributions to the mission of our museums. One of them was Betty Adams who until very recently was the mainstay of the St. James Textile Museum. It was under Sylvia’s initial inspiration and guidance that Betty began the project of replicating our valuable collection of historic costumes so as to preserve the originals for future generations. The replicas were often lent to other organizations, for example to Live Bait Theatre for its historical productions and for the New Brunswick bicentennial celebrations. Sylvia and Betty also did workshops on costume and fashion design for other historical organizations, so their skills opened paths to the past that went far beyond Dorchester.

After the successful restoration of Keillor House, the Society began to discuss what other historic buildings in Dorchester might be saved. By the early 1970s there was a movement to turn the whole village into a historic site and tourist attraction along the lines of King’s Landing and Village Acadien. Unfortunately, the idea never came to complete fruition, but there was enough government interest in it as an opportunity for economic development to get some significant grant money flowing. The first candidate for another restoration project was the Bell Inn. “Dorchester Heritage Properties” was created as a special committee within WHS to manage it as well as any future projects of a similar nature, and once again Sylvia was a key member. However, as with any government largesse, there were strings attached. Although willing to help restore them, the government was neither willing nor able to sustain historic buildings indefinitely just for the sake of preserving them. They would have to be self-sustaining, or at least go a long way toward covering the cost of their upkeep.

One way to do this for the Bell was to build apartments in it. The other source of revenue was the tearoom that later became the Bell Inn Restaurant and this, too, was Sylvia's idea. As you can (and I hope you will) (re)-read in the September 2014 issue of the Newsletter, she recruited Katie (who was managing a restaurant at Jasper Park Lodge at the time), bought some equipment with a small legacy she had inherited from her mother, and set up shop in the front room with the tiny kitchen below. While Katie became the "chief cook and bottle washer"—and everything else to boot—Sylvia made the soup and helped out in the tearoom whenever she could be away from her many other activities. The soups, breads, pastries, and especially Granny's homemade ice cream—all following local recipes—proved so popular that by the end of the very first summer the Bell Inn Tearoom had made it into *Where to Eat in Canada*, a legacy passed on to and sustained for many years by the Yeomans' successors, David McAllister and Wayne Jones.

It was during the restoration of the Bell Inn that Sylvia, the "amiable steamroller," took on an assistant to fill out grant applications, one who quickly became her Girl Friday and eventually her successor as WHS's chief go-getter. It took two issues of the Newsletter (June and September 2016) just to outline Alice's role in the Society over the last forty years but we need to remember (and Alice would be the first to remind us) that all the heroic achievements before 1997 (when Sylvia left Dorchester) were accomplished together, with Sylvia in the role of mentor and facilitator through her many contacts with just the right people in just the right places at just the right times. Besides the Bell Inn, they include: the restoration of the St. James Presbyterian Church as the new home of Pam Black's Beachkirk Collection and its transformation into the St. James Textile Museum; the restoration of the Payzant & Card building to become an apartment building and public library; the restoration of the Landry house to the same purpose minus the library; the building of the visitor information centre that has since become a hair-dressing salon; the first phase of the second restoration of Keillor House after it was discovered that the front wall was in danger of collapsing; the cultivation of the relationship with Graydon Milton whose legacy has been the Society's salvation.

Quickly recognizing Alice's talents and dedication (whether as an employee or unpaid volunteer—which she was most of the time), Sylvia began her mentoring by building up her protégée's self-confidence. At that time Alice was very shy, hard as that is to believe today. She fondly remembers their first attendance at the Association of New Brunswick Museums. Just as they were entering the dining hall for the first luncheon, Sylvia asked her to sit at a different table so that she would be forced to introduce herself to strangers and talk about what the Society was doing. Alice was terrified, but it broke the ice, and she has never looked back. "She had a knack of making you feel you could do it," Alice said. "You could walk into her house any time of day. She would drop everything and talk over a cup of tea."

The "amiable steamroller" was indeed a visionary with remarkable people skills. When she received the Order of Canada in 1984 (the year of the New Brunswick bicentennial) Alice organized a "roast" for her (remember those?) At it, Mark declared that Sylvia could get on a bus to Moncton (she never learned to drive, but there was still a bus service in Dorchester) and by the time she got off she would know everyone on it,

as well as all their families for three generations. No wonder she always had contacts for any job that needed to be done! Let one example stand for many. When an expert from Fredericton told Alice that the front wall of Keillor House would stand for another hundred years even though she had raised the alarm after seeing snow blowing through it, she was baffled as to how to convince the province (which at that time owned the building) that there was a problem. Sylvia to the rescue! She just happened to know a retired military engineer who was living in Port Elgin. And so Jack Lines explained it to the experts in engineer's language and a temporary support was installed, saving the wall from collapse. A few years later he headed the committee that managed the full restoration, and the wall did indeed "rise again."

As Alice remembers her, Sylvia was someone you just couldn't say 'no' to. She was never bossy or pushy, but always made you feel that you were doing her a favour, and you were always glad when you did it. She just had a gift for getting people to do the right thing and making them feel good about it. As an example, Alice told the story of a local young 'tough' who was forever taking the Bell Inn sign down from the tree onto which it was attached and leaving it on the ground. Sylvia found out from one of her sons who the culprit was, but instead of confronting him openly with his misdeed, she took a different tack, one that was entirely typical of her way of dealing with people. The next time she saw him sitting on the wall in front of the Bell with the sign down on the ground beside him, she simply went up to him and, without letting on that she knew he was the one who was taking it down, said, "You wouldn't do me a favour, would you? I've been trying to get that sign up there to stay and I can't do it. Are you able to do that? Could you put that up for me?" "Sure," he said, his voice swelling with pride. He put it back up and none of the other young rascals dared take it down again. The sign now had a protector.

Alice has many fond memories of Sylvia and her family, and her common theme during our conversation was their kindness to all and their dedication to the common good. She particularly treasures an anecdote that Sylvia's old nanny told at her 'roast'. When Sylvia was a child on a Nova Scotia farm during the 1920s and early 30s it was still the law that property owners were responsible for work on the roads, either in person or by paying for a substitute. The work was done during a specific time each year and when it came around Sylvia would fill her doll carriage with rocks, push it out to the road and fill in the potholes.

As Katie remarked at the end of her article on her parents and their role in WHS, "History is in her bones." So, too, were kindness, generosity, and service to others. When her family was asked for memories to enshrine in her obituary these qualities are what they focused on. We have Alice's testimony that they were also the ones that drove and informed her tremendous contribution to WHS. We are grateful for all of them.

*Gene Goodrich with Alice Folkins*

## DORCHESTER'S FIRST JAIL AND HANGING

Now that Dorchester's latest attraction has arrived with the conversion of the old provincial jail into an Airbnb B&B where guests can experience the clammy ambience of a genuine prison cell and possibly thrill to a midnight visit from ghosts of hangings past, it seems like it's the Westmorland Historical Society's public duty to offer some historical background. This we propose to do in a series of *WHS Newsletter* articles on the three courthouses and jails that stood in Dorchester and the five hangings they witnessed.

Let's begin by clarifying one point about the "provincial jail." It's true that after the effective dissolution of the counties in 1965 it served as a provincial jail until 1993, and was indeed called such. But when it was the scene of hangings, the last of which took place in 1936, it was the *county* jail of Westmorland County. All the other New Brunswick counties had their own courthouse and jail and did their own hangings, if they had any to do.

The first courthouse and jail in Dorchester was completed in 1803 but it wasn't the first one in Westmorland County. As explained in the June 2012 issue of the *Newsletter* ("Why Dorchester became the Shiretown and Sackville Did Not," also available online on the Keillor House website), the first one was located in Westmorland Parish just a little to the southeast of St. Mark's Anglican Church. Sometime in late 1800 it burned to the ground without ever having witnessed a hanging. Not everyone in the county was sad about it—the burning, that is. Its location close to the Nova Scotia border made it very inconvenient for the inhabitants of the central and western parts of Westmorland County—which until 1845 included all of Albert County—to conduct their legal business. There were many complaints, and the embers were barely cold when petitions were raised in the parishes of Dorchester, Moncton, Salisbury, Hillsborough, Hopewell, and even Westmorland to have its successor built in Dorchester near the home of John Keillor. Their stated reason was that it was conveniently located in the centre of the county on the main road between Saint John and Nova Scotia. In spite of a counter-petition from the jealous inhabitants of Sackville Parish offering voluntary contributions (in other words a bribe) to "relieve the rest of the county from part of the taxes" if the new courthouse and jail were located there, the provincial government declared Dorchester the new shiretown on February 21, 1801. The following January, John Keillor, who had been in previous contact with the successful petitioners, donated four acres of land on which to build the new court-

house and jail "in consideration of the good will I have for the County of Westmorland and the desire I feel to promote the interests and advancement thereof."

For the first two years after the relocation of the shiretown, the county courts were held on Dorchester Island in a large stone house built by the county's Big Shot, Amos Botsford, but at the time owned by merchant and Methodist lay preacher Benjamin Wilson. (The present Bowser house was built over its foundation.) In the meantime, the county's Justices of the Peace, in whose hands such matters lay, levied a poll tax on each parish in the county to raise £300. It was supplemented by a £100 grant from the provincial government and construction began on a new courthouse and jail. (Where, or even if, there was a jail on the Island is not recorded.) The following year (1802) saw another levy and provincial grant in the same amounts, and the building was finished in time for the fall and winter sittings of the courts in 1803. The total cost was £700, the price of a really nice farm complete with house and out-buildings, and it appears to have been built accordingly. It was probably the grandest edifice in the county at that time. No drawings or paintings have survived, if they ever existed, and it was destroyed by fire decades before photography was invented, so we have no pictures of it. But the record of the General Sessions of the Peace (the biannual meeting of the Justices of the Peace where taxes were levied and many other matters settled) gives its specifications and offers other information that helps to visualize it.

It was a wooden building of frame construction (not logs, like most of the houses in the area at that time) and measured forty-eight feet by thirty-two, making it rather larger than Keillor House without the annexes. It had two stories, the second only slightly lower than the first, and contained both the courthouse and jail "under one and the same roof." The good Justices specifically ordered that the jail be above ground, sensitive, perhaps, to the inhumanity of the traditional cellar dungeon that may have been a feature of the first courthouse at Westmorland Point. John Palmer, who was born in 1789 and lived to be a hundred, told W.C. Milner, Sackville's famous newspaper editor and antiquarian whose works are still much mined by local historians, that the jail was on the first floor and the courthouse on the second. He also told him something else about the building that may strike us as rather strange: that it had a tavern. This is confirmed by the record of the General Sessions of the Peace, which granted a tavern licence to John Keillor's brother, Robert, in 1803 and allowed him "to erect a

Kitchen and Tables for the accommodation of the Court House.” Robert was appointed the first Jailer of the new Dorchester ‘facility’, in which capacity he saw to the boarding of the prisoners. His successor as Jailer, Josiah Wood, grandfather of the prominent Sackville merchant and later Lt. Governor of the province of the same name, also ran a tavern in the courthouse. Palmer seems to have told Milner that the tavern served the needs of the travelling public as well as the courts and their litigants and I found definite proof of this in some of Josiah Wood’s papers preserved in the Mount Allison University Archives.

Dorchester’s first courthouse and jail was thus something of a ‘multipurpose’ building, used among other things as a meetinghouse for both Methodists and Anglicans before any churches were built in the shiretown. In 1807 the General Sessions gave permission to the “Society of Methodists...to make use of the Public Court Room the ensuing year as a place of public worship, they paying thirty shillings for the same, provided that it does not interfere at anytime with the Public Courts or business, or with the established Church [of England].” The following year, they leased the entire premises to Keeper Wood for two years “with the exception of the Bitters Room and Dungeon and subject to the Privileges granted to the Society of Methodists.” The purpose was unspecified but Wood is known to have run a school as well as a tavern, and he may have used the building in part for that purpose.

Wood’s successor as Jailer was Andrew Kinnear, some of whose relatives later ran the Bell Inn. Nothing of note is recorded about his tenure in office until 1820 when some prisoners set fire to the building in order to facilitate their escape, and it burned to the ground. Thus, Dorchester’s first courthouse and jail ended its days in fiery ignominy just like its predecessor, but not before having been the scene of Westmorland County’s first, and in many ways most lurid, murder trial and public hanging.

#### *The King vs. Amos Babcock 1805*

After twenty years of only occasional violent offences no more serious than common assault and battery punishable by modest fines and the occasional whipping, Westmorland County finally got its first murder conviction and consequent hanging in 1805. It was only the third murder in New Brunswick since the province was founded in 1784 and even so it was not connected with a robbery, domestic dispute, personal injury, jealous lover or any other of the usual motives for mayhem. Nor was it premeditated. It was, rather, the tragic result of religious enthusiasm run amok, all the more shocking in that the murderer and his victim were brother and sister.

The murderer was Amos Babcock, a simple uneducated farmer and fisherman who had recently moved from Hillsborough with his wife and nine children to join his brother Jonathan in the new settlement of Shediac. Included in his household was his sister, Mercy Hall, but she was not a very welcome addition to it. Said to have been “of a melancholy disposition,” she had been abandoned by her husband and apparently didn’t get along with Amos’ wife. She was not even allowed to eat at the same table with the rest of the family.

The trouble started in the spring of 1804 when the Babcocks joined a number of their similarly simple and uneducated neighbours in a succession of increasingly frequent revival meetings led by a series of successively more extravagant—not to say crackpot—travelling preachers known as New Dispensationalists. They represented the radical fringe of the great New Light revivalist movement that swept Britain and America during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was brought to Nova Scotia by the famous Falmouth evangelist, Henry Alline (d. 1784). ‘New Lighters’ taught that salvation only comes through a direct personal experience of God that occurs suddenly after a long period of repentance when the sinner wholeheartedly accepts Jesus as his Saviour and is “born again” in the Holy Spirit. New Lighters tended to play down the importance of church organization and even Bible study, and to play up the workings of the Holy Spirit as a source of ‘new light’. New converts were encouraged to ‘witness’ and ‘exhort’ even though they had little or no formal education and were only vaguely familiar with Scripture and the Christian tradition. This opened the door to the New Dispensationalists who took the ‘experience’ of the Holy Spirit to its logical limits, much to the consternation of the mainstream New Lighters. Once “born again” and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, the New Dispensationalists asserted, believers are no longer bound by ordinary moral, civil or criminal laws, but only by what the Spirit moves them to do. They even went so far as to claim that the born again soul *cannot* sin, even if the body commits every abomination in the book. Their revival meetings were generally scenes of extreme emotionalism—great groans of despair, loud cries of joy, copious outpourings of tears, etc.—whipped up by overwrought preachers who regularly announced the end of the world and urged their followers to “flee the wrath to come” by calling down the Holy Spirit. Not infrequently, “It” duly came upon one or another of the participants and filled them with powers of prophecy. Very often, the recipient of the sudden indwelling was a woman or girl who was then recognized by the others as a conduit of God’s Holy Word. All these elements were present in the events leading up to the murder of Mercy Hall, although it probably went beyond anything even the wildest

New Dispensationalist had previously imagined.

The first revivalist meetings in Shediac were led by ordained mainstream New Light preachers like Joseph Crandall who later went on to organize the Baptist Church in New Brunswick, and they were relatively tame. But New Dispensationalists soon followed and the pace of lunacy picked up. At first, meetings were held once a week but as enthusiasm grew they became more frequent and lasted longer. By the fall of 1804 we hear of two young preachers who held one that went on all night and into the next morning "attended by the most extraordinary scenes of religious excitement." Then in January 1805 came Jacob Peck of Salisbury, an unordained and barely literate New Dispensationalist 'exhorter' who nevertheless had considerable powers of persuasion, particularly over a naïve and ignorant audience. He soon outdid all his predecessors "in the extravagance of his appeals to the excitable nature of his hearers." According to his "New Light" he was a new John the Baptist sent to announce the Judgment Day. By February he was the star performer at a series of frenzied meetings that went on virtually unbroken for the better part of a week. Under the strain, some participants became convinced that they, too, had been personally visited by the Holy Spirit and marked out for a special mission. Two impressionable teen-age girls, one of them a Babcock daughter, fell into a series of trances during which they prophesied the conversion of the Acadians, the imminent end of this world in a flood, and the creation of a new one, complete with a new Saviour who would be crucified just like the first one. Of course they also foresaw the salvation of some particular individuals and the damnation of others. The Babcock girl said that she would die soon and then come back as an angel to take her father, mother and all her siblings up to heaven, but that Mercy Hall would not join them, as she was condemned to Hell. Peck did his part by encouraging the girls' ravings and declaring them to be authentic messages from God. "This is my Epistle," he said, pointing to the girls who were lying on a bed in one of their trances. "From them I shall preach and take my text."

This was enough to convince Amos that he, too, was singled out by the Lord for an important role in the coming drama, and it turned out to be a horrific one, entirely unrelated to anything to be found in Scripture and beyond anything previous 'New Dispensationalists' had ever done. Completely unhinged by the unremitting "spiritual exercises," he got it into his head that he was the Angel Gabriel, sent to announce, not the coming of the Saviour, but the end of the world, and to act as an avenger even before the official arrival of Judgment Day. On the night of February

13<sup>th</sup> he went completely insane. The gruesome details are recorded in the deposition his brother Jonathan, who was at Amos' house that fatal evening, made to coroner Gideon Palmer. Upon hearing a sound, Amos went outside, looked upwards, sniffed and returned to say that some great thing would happen that night and that he would not be surprised if the Lord would come to call the people to judgment. Going out again, he saw the stars falling from heaven. Back in again, he told his wife and children to be of good cheer, for nothing would hurt them. Walking over to a window, he said, "I see them coming; it will be but a few minutes before they will be here." Then came the really crazy part. He sharpened his clasp knife on a whetstone and laid them both on the hearth, the knife upon the stone, and said it was a Cross. Next he anointed his children by spitting on their heads. He blew into the mouth of one of the younger ones, almost strangling it, then threw it across the room into a wall. He ordered Jonathan to strip naked, saying that he [Amos] was the Angel Gabriel. He pulled Mercy Hall's cap off her head and told her to take off her shoes and "make herself ready". He told his wife to look him steadily in the eye and then struck her with his fist. Apparently convinced that 'Gabriel' was for real, all of them meekly obeyed, but then the awful truth was revealed to them. Amos first turned on Jonathan, making two or three feints with his knife and striking him with his free hand. Then he walked across the room and with a running lunge to the other side stabbed Mercy Hall three times, to wit "in and upon the...pit of the stomach between the breasts...six inches; in and upon the right side of the belly between the hip and short ribs...five inches; in and upon the ...back part of the head...length of three inches and depth of half an inch," according to the coroner's inquest. As Mercy "screached out" her last breath Jonathan made his escape to alarm the neighbours. When they organized a party to arrest him they discovered that Amos had dragged her body into a snow bank and disembowelled it. In an apparent effort to hide it, he had then walked backwards to the house, sweeping the snow over his tracks with a broom. Evidently, he harboured a pent up rage against Mercy, probably because she either didn't attend the revival meetings or disbelieved the prophecies. According to testimony that came out during the trial, the whole family considered her a 'reprobate'.

Still out of his head when the arresting party arrived, Amos had to be subdued by force. All the time he kept repeating, "Aha! Aha! Aha! It was permitted! It was permitted!" an apparent assertion of the New Dispensationalist doctrine that his direct revelation from God trumped any conventional morality or the laws of the land. Pending transportation to Dorchester, he was taken to the house of one of the prominent members of the revivalist circle who had now turned against him. There he became violent and had to be strapped onto a bed with his

arms fastened to the floor. Here he lay for three days waiting for a storm to clear and when it finally did the road was too snow blown to be passable by horses. So he was tied onto a light one-horse sled and hauled by men on snowshoes the twenty-six miles through the woods to the new Dorchester jail where Jailer Robert Keillor would have greeted him. He languished there until his trial on June 14-15, which was held in the county courthouse during a sitting of the Supreme Court on circuit. He pleaded 'not guilty'. The Clerk did not record his grounds for doing so, but, given Amos' delusions and the fact that one of the two witnesses for his defence was the daughter who believed she would return from the other side to take her family up to Heaven, while the other was an active participant in the revival, it was probably based on the argument that "it was permitted" by divine dispensation.

The only other conceivable defence was insanity, and perhaps it would have been offered if Amos had had a lawyer. At that time, however, defendants indicted for a capital crime were not allowed legal counsel except on points of law unless they were insane at the time of the trial or too dumbstruck to enter a plea. Modern commentators on the case have not failed to underline the injustice of this, usually implying that if Amos could be retried today he would be found innocent on grounds of insanity and committed to a mental institution. I am not so sure of that. In his opening remarks to the jury, the Crown prosecutor, Solicitor General Ward Chipman, actually anticipated a defence on grounds of insanity and laid out some well-prepared counter arguments that would make a formidable case even today. If insanity—whether permanent or temporary—is Babcock's defence, he said, a total absence of rationality must be proven, "an absolute dispossession of the free and natural agency of the human mind." Moreover, he must not have brought it upon himself voluntarily (by accepting New Dispensationalist doctrines, he implied), just as drunkenness is no excuse for a crime "though it may make a man mad, that he knows not what he does." All atrocious crimes, Chipman argued, involve a certain degree of madness, but that does not excuse the perpetrator if he was in possession of his faculties before and after the crime was committed. According to evidence entered by the prosecution, Amos showed signs of rationality as well as madness both before and after the murder. Only the Crown prosecutor's rough notes and a very brief record of the trial have been preserved, so we have just a general notion of what the evidence was, but it probably included Amos' attempt to cover his tracks when he hid the body. Robert Keillor also made some unspecified "accidental discovery" that apparently disproved his "affectation of insanity" during his time in jail. Chipman

suggested another motive for the murder besides religious delusion: "the supposed former grudge" and "that the deceased was considered a reprobate."

He also anticipated the defence that Babcock was innocent of murder because, although sane, he was sincerely convinced that God had ordained Mercy's death and dispensed him from the normal penalty for that crime: "Nor will any wild fanatic opinion [exculpate him], that a man may be so in a state of grace that no act he commits can be attended with guilt." This was a clear swipe at the central teaching of the New Dispensationalists and Chipman refuted it with reference to Scripture itself. Not only was it against the spirit of the Gospels, it was actually *anticipated* in them as a delusion of the damned: "With regard to those whose coming is after the working of Satan—because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved—for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, *that they should believe a lie* [Chipman's emphasis].

This touched the heart of the matter and revealed that the Babcock trial was about much more than the murder of Mercy Hall. The leading government authorities, all of them Anglicans, as well as the Anglican clergy (which represented what was supposed to be the Established Church in Loyalist New Brunswick), were deeply suspicious of the New Light Movement in general and particularly alarmed by the extravagant claims of the radical New Dispensationalists. Not only were they a challenge to the organized churches that based morality on the teachings of Scripture, and the interpretation of Scripture on learning and tradition, they were also a challenge to secular authority based on laws that apply to everyone. This kind of thing had been seen before and it could too easily get out of hand. If the moral and ecclesiastical order could be turned on its head by sudden illuminations from Heaven, would the social and political order be next? In 1805 the American and French Revolutions were still fresh in everyone's mind and Napoleon was bestriding Europe like a colossus. Good Loyalists hated all of them and Chipman did not fail to make the connection to the Babcock case. "It is to such delusions," he said, "that all the disorganizing principles of the present day may in great measure be attributed."

The same fear of disorder and potential revolution was reflected in the arrest of Jacob Peck soon after Amos was apprehended. He was not jailed but he had to post bonds to appear at the same June sitting of the Supreme Court on circuit, and when it met he was indicted for blasphemous and seditious language. The specific charges were: 1) bringing "the Christian religion and the doctrines thereof into derision and contempt" by impersonating John the Baptist and authenticating the 'revelations' of the two girls, and 2) bringing "our Lord the King and the British Constitution and Government into contempt and derision, hatred and dislike" by claiming that "the King of England...hath prophesied that there will be



no crowned heads within ten years.”

Peck had revealed the King’s supposed prophesy during the girls’ trance in order to establish his own credentials as a prophet, but apparently the prosecution taxed him with saying that monarchy itself is unjust and that its days are limited, for he had also spoken of “a great reformation in England and France.” The legal basis of the charges is unclear, but they may have been a quaint colonial echo of an act passed by the British Parliament in 1792 imposing exile for up to seven years on anyone who uttered or declared “any words or sentences to excite or stir up the people to hatred or contempt of the person of his Majesty, his heirs or successors, or the government and constitution of this realm.” 1792 was the height of the Reign of Terror, and the act clearly had the French Revolution in mind.

Amos Babcock’s case “came on” on Saturday June 15, attended by a large concourse of spectators. The six Crown witnesses included his brother Jonathan, Jailer Robert Keilnor, and three other members of the Shediac revivalist circle, one of them a woman who, like Mercy Hall, had been condemned to perdition by the two young girls ‘revelations’. Evidently, they had now seen the New Light in a new light. As mentioned before, the two witnesses for the defence were Amos’ prophetic daughter and another member of the revivalist circle who appears to have believed that the appalling deed “was permitted.” The trial lasted about six hours. The jury, made up entirely of local farmers, deliberated only half an hour before returning a guilty verdict. His Honour Judge Joshua Upham pronounced the terrible sentence and all the onlookers “appeared to be satisfied of [its] justice.” It was carried out on June 28 and the body buried under the gallows. The brief write up of the trial in the Saint John newspaper *Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser* made clear what the orthodox hoped its effect would be on the New Light movement and especially on its radical New Dispensationalist wing. “It is hoped and expected that these legal proceedings will have a good effect in putting to an end the strange and lamentable delusion that made them necessary and brought the unhappy culprit to such an ignominious death.”

In this the orthodox would not be disappointed. The shocking murder of Mercy Hall delivered the death blow to New Dispensationalism, as even its adherents turned away in revulsion, or at least in fear of public shaming. Much to the further satisfaction of the enemies of religious emotionalism—who included Congregationalists and Presbyterians as well as Anglicans—it also dimmed the New Light Movement itself by considerable candlepower and rendered even mainstream Baptists and Methodists somewhat suspect in the

eyes of many. Both of the latter denominations suffered a serious decline in southeast New Brunswick after having enjoyed gratifying growth in the decades before the “Babcock Tragedy.” The Baptists, however, in spite of their endless divisions and quarrels, made a spectacular comeback during the 1830s to become the dominant denomination in New Brunswick.

It is probably a measure of the thoroughness of the New Dispensationalists’ rout that Jacob Peck was never brought to trial. He appeared at the same court that convicted Amos Babcock and likewise entered a plea of not guilty, but he also stated that he was not ready to stand trial because he hadn’t had time to secure witnesses for his defence. Once again, he was allowed to post a bond obligating himself to appear at the next sitting of the Supreme Court on circuit in Westmorland County, and once again he was able to find two men of good reputation willing to post their own bonds a sureties for his appearance, one of them the well-respected Baptist minister Henry Steeves. At this point I have to explain that, at that time, the Supreme Court of New Brunswick, unlike its counterparts in Nova Scotia and elsewhere, did not go out on regular circuit. Rather, it delegated one of its judges to travel to the shiretown of a particular county (Dorchester in Westmorland County) on an “as needed” basis and, together with the judges of the county’s Inferior Court of Common Pleas, “hear and determine” whatever cases had been piling up in the county that were beyond the jurisdiction of the two county courts—which of course included murder. Known as a “Court of *Nisi Prius*,” this court sat very infrequently. The one that convicted Babcock was only the fourth one to sit in Westmorland County since the founding of the province. By the time the next one rolled around the Crown had decided to drop the matter, probably because the New Dispensationalist craze was pretty well dead and in the newly relaxed political atmosphere it would have been difficult to get a conviction on the vague charge of seditious and blasphemous language. After all, it wasn’t as though Peck had been indicted for inciting a murder. Some recent commentators think he should have been, but on what basis is far from clear. In any case, he returned to Salisbury where he continued life as a respected resident of the parish, even serving several times in one of the parish offices, including that of Overseer of the Poor, the then equivalent of a welfare officer and quite a responsible position. We can pretty well take it for granted that he never preached again.

*Gene Goodrich*

## THE DORCHESTER POORHOUSE: LOST BUT UNLAMENTED

As part of WHS's ongoing efforts to record at least some of the memories of Dorchester's old-timers, last fall Judy Morrison and I interviewed Bessie Chapman, now ninety, who was chosen Senior Citizen of the Year in 2015. (Judy did most of the interviewing, while I acted as 'sound engineer.') Bessie has many fond memories of life in Dorchester since she came here in 1944 at the age of sixteen, and we talked of many things. One topic that piqued our interest was the poorhouse. Together with the penitentiary and the county (later the provincial) jail, it was one of the shiretown's defining institutions for forty years. Bessie's parents, John and Dorothy Smith, ran the place from 1942 until it closed in 1967. Even after she went to work in the telephone office, Bessie continued to board with her parents, sharing in their duties between her own shifts and even taking charge herself when they took a short break each summer. She had many interesting tales to tell about the Municipal Home and its 'inmates', as it and they were called at the time, but before turning to them we thought it a good idea to fill in a bit of historical background on poorhouses in New Brunswick in general, and the one in Dorchester in particular, so I did a bit of additional research for the occasion. It's a good opportunity for another lesson in 'shiretown history', so get out your notebooks, sit up straight, and pay close attention.

Well into the twentieth century, poor relief in much of New Brunswick, including Westmorland County, was little different from what it had been since the province was founded in 1784. Paupers, vagrants, idlers and the mentally or physically incompetent were dealt with by a group of amateur officials known as the Overseers of the Poor. Overseers could 'assist' their 'clients' in several ways. One possibility was "outdoor relief" in the form of food, clothing, fuel, etc., paid for by the 'poor rate' assessed on the property owners of the parish and/or the fines for petty offences (such as letting livestock run loose), and sometimes by a tax on dogs. This was helpful, although rarely adequate, for those who still had their own homes or could live with friends or relatives. But it didn't solve the problem of idlers, the homeless or those physically or mentally incapable of work. Of course the problem was compounded when children were involved.

The Overseers could force able-bodied idlers, on threat of imprisonment at hard labour for up to one month, to work for anyone willing to employ them. They could also apprentice children found "in a suffering condition" to local worthies, boys until age twenty-one, girls until they were eighteen or married, to be given only room and board and a small departing gift when they came of age.

Forced employment and 'apprenticeship' took care of the able-bodied poor inasmuch as any care was taken of them at all in the days before welfare, but this still left the aged and infirm, the sick, the alcoholic, the homeless, the unemployable—in short the truly destitute. Here the remedy was to contract with "suitable persons" who would keep paupers in their homes "for the least expense," something that quickly led to abuses. One was the temptation to chintz on the food and other necessities of life. The host was paid an agreed upon amount, calculated to cover expenditures and leave a little extra in the pocket. But the less the expenditures, the larger was the 'little extra'. The other evil was a competition among prospective hosts that led to negative bidding wars, as the Overseers could play one off against another. In some places, although apparently not in Westmorland County, it even led to the distressing and degrading spectacle of public pauper auctions that sold these unfortunates for a year to the lowest bidder. Whether by public auction or private negotiation, the evil effect of having to acquire the family cash cow at a price barely above the cost of maintaining her will need no elaboration.

It was these abuses that led to the establishment of poorhouses, which were neither unique nor original in New Brunswick. Like the poor laws and Overseers of the Poor, they were copied from both New and Old England, where similar problems had arisen. The first poorhouses were called 'almshouses' and they simply maintained the inmates in larger numbers and at generally lower cost than the farming-out method, which nonetheless continued to exist side by side with them until well into the twentieth century. But the classic poorhouse as it developed by the end of the nineteenth century was a combination of almshouse and another institution that was part of the original poor law legislation. This was the workhouse, specifically conceived to punish idlers and vagrants, complete with whippings and the abridgement of their already meagre rations if they misbehaved or wouldn't cooperate. The poorhouse, generally called an 'Almshouse and Work House' and later a 'Municipal Home', de-emphasized (but didn't completely eliminate) the punishments and operated instead on the principle that able-bodied paupers should contribute to their own support by working in and around the almshouse, preferably on a farm associated with it. The 'workhouse' associated with a poorhouse was essentially the farm and the almshouse itself, which inmates were required to help maintain.

The first New Brunswick poorhouse in this sense was established in York County (in the unincorporated town of Fredericton) in 1823. In 1843 it became the model for a similar insti-

tution in Saint John City and County where a simple almshouse had been built in a renovated gristmill in 1801. Two other county almshouse/workhouses appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one in Chatham, Northumberland County, in 1869 and another in Norton, Kings County, in 1899. Westmorland County did not have a county-run poorhouse until the Municipal Home was established in Dorchester in 1928, but after 1900 there were two that were not run by the county, just as there were in some other counties of New Brunswick. To explain, we need a brief digression on some changes in local government during the nineteenth century that are also relevant to the story of the Dorchester institution.

Except for Saint John, which was incorporated as a city with appointed mayor and elected council when the province was founded, all local government in New Brunswick was originally delegated in 'top down' management style to the counties and the parishes within them. The provincial government appointed all public officials at the county level, the most important and numerous of which were the Justices of the Peace, and the Justices in turn appointed, on an annual basis (renewable), the parish officers such as the Overseers of the Poor. All initiative in local government, including whether to deal with the poor through the Overseers or/and in a poorhouse, came from or through the Justices, meaning that such institutions could only be established by the county, with the approval of the provincial government, of course.

By the mid nineteenth century local government by appointed officials was increasingly seen by reformers like Albert J. Smith, and even many moderates like E. B. Chandler, as incompatible with the democratic temper of the times. The remedy was the incorporation of the counties along the lines of towns and cities, governed by county councils made up of elected delegates from each parish who then elected a Warden for a limited term from among themselves. Like their predecessors run by the Justices of the Peace, these new democratic counties, which were made mandatory throughout the province in 1877, were authorized to establish almshouse/workhouses supervised by an appointed Board of Commissioners. However, many of them, including Westmorland County, were for a long time reluctant to do so as there was considerable resistance to poorhouses, partly because they diminished the importance of the Overseers of the Poor, but mainly because many feared they would increase taxes. At the same time, many others, especially in the more urbanized areas with greater numbers of destitute paupers, favoured them. Naturally, this led to conflict and resentment. To mitigate it,

the provincial government passed legislation allowing incorporated towns and cities, and even parishes, to establish poorhouses in places where the county would not. The two jurisdictions in Westmorland County that took advantage of it were the City (but not the Parish) of Moncton in 1895 and the Parish of Shediac in 1900.

So much by way of background. We can now turn to the origins of the Municipal Home in Dorchester and the reasons it was established here, rather than somewhere else in the county.

The first mention of a poorhouse in the Westmorland County Council minutes was in July 1913 when Warden Clinton C. Campbell read "a communication from the Town of Sackville re: an almshouse." Evidently some people in Sackville were talking about the need for more such institutions in the county, and perhaps even considering one in Sackville, but no further details were given and there is no further mention of the matter in the minutes until January 1924. However, there must have been further discussion that was not recorded, because one of the first orders of business at that meeting was the appointment of a Municipal Home Committee to study the matter. One of its members, and the one who would play the key role in locating the home in Dorchester, was Councilor Frederick Clinton Palmer of Dorchester Parish. Some readers may remember him personally, as, in spite of having been born in 1850, he didn't die until 1945. Others will know that he was the founder and operator of F.C. Palmer Ltd., one of the shiretown's two leading general stores (the other being Hickman's). It later became Bishop's Hardware.

The committee submitted its report in January 1925 and a number of Councilors expressed their support. But there was also resistance. One issue was the cost to taxpayers. Some wondered if it might not be cheaper to support paupers in their own homes. Others worried about the public debt, as a Municipal Home was bound to be very costly. Initial estimates came in at about \$10,000. A number of Councilors were in favour of it personally (or said they were) but were unsure of their constituents and wanted to know if their parishes would be bound by a resolution to proceed. Understandably, they were upset when they learned that, as the law stood, the answer was 'yes'.

In spite of these hesitations the committee proceeded to look for a suitable property and by the July 1925 session of Council (there were two each year, held in the Dorchester courthouse) it was ready with some recommendations. Having considered it more advisable to purchase land and erect a new building rather than repair an old one, it looked at three farms in the vicinity of Sackville. (This may have had something to do with the fact that both the chairman and secretary of the committee were from Sackville.) Two of them were far too expensive at \$10,000 and

\$8,000, but it was pleased to recommend the purchase of the Morice Farm (which was associated with Morice Mill on what is now called Silver Lake, but then Morice Mill Pond) for \$6000. Upon hearing the report, some of the Councilors who otherwise “had the greatest sympathy for such a home” did not think it good business to pay \$6000 for the land and then have to erect buildings on it, as this was bound to drive the total cost to “nearly \$20,000.” A motion was passed that the “matter lay over until January” (of 1926) but not before quite a number had spoken in favour of proceeding immediately. Committee member Palmer even declared that he “did not think a more suitable site could be selected than the Morice property,” even though some had questioned whether Sackville was sufficiently central to be the proper location.

The committee duly brought the matter up again at the January 1926 session, with the two Sackville members, in particular, recommending buying land and building from scratch. They had asked various builders for estimates and, having gotten a figure of around \$7000, didn’t think the total cost would exceed \$15,000. When resistance to the cost and location nonetheless continued, Mr. Palmer suddenly announced that he had the solution. Although he still believed the Sackville lot was “an admirable one,” it had just come to his attention that the Lady Smith property in Dorchester was for sale, and he thought it could be had for only \$2000 even though it included twenty acres “in a high state of cultivation.”

He was of course referring to Sir Albert J. Smith’s relict who had recently died after forty-four years of eccentric widowhood in the handsome mansion that Dorchester’s ‘Stepfather of Confederation’ acquired in 1842. \$2000 might not seem very much for what should have been a splendid property, but Lady Smith’s many eccentricities included—in spite of her considerable wealth—a pathological stinginess that left every broken dish, cup, or piece of furniture unreplaced, and the house itself in a sadly deteriorated condition. (In the event, however, the county had to pay \$3000 for it and the land.)

Besides the bargain price and the “high state of cultivation” of the attached land, Palmer had another reason for suggesting a Dorchester location: There was a “great deal of labour at the jail that should be made some use of.” This seems to have clinched the matter. By the end of the meeting a committee was appointed (that also included Palmer) to examine the property and prepare plans and estimates for a Municipal Home, to be ready for the July sessions. The meeting also passed a motion heartily approving “the plan to have the

inmates of the County Gaol [older spelling of jail] perform work on a farm, the proceeds of which may be used for their maintenance.” So it seems that the Dorchester institution was originally planned as a combination of poorhouse, workhouse, and prison farm.

The committee duly reported to the July 1926 session, recommending the purchase of a lot in Dorchester, the erection of “an almshouse thereon” at a total cost not to exceed \$15,000, and the appointment of a building committee to call for tenders and supervise the construction. At this point new resistance broke out, mainly from the Councilors representing the City of Moncton, the Parish of Moncton and the Parish of Shediac. Councilor Johnson of Moncton didn’t think a county debt of \$15-20,000 would be advisable at this time and wanted the parish exempted from any liability in connection with the home. The City of Moncton already had an almshouse and it was only partly occupied. The poor of the parish could be cared for in it. Councilor Melanson of Shediac personally thought the proposed home was a good thing, but Shediac, too, already had one—and it was well run—so, considering the resistance of his constituents, he felt he had to ask that his parish be similarly exempted from any liability for the new institution.

Another problem was the ‘French’ (as the Acadians were commonly called). The proposed new home was to be for the ‘English’ (as everyone else was commonly called). This brought up the question of fairness. Should the ‘French’ be taxed for the home if they weren’t going to use it? (It was generally agreed that they shouldn’t be.) There was also a legal complication. The establishment of a county-run almshouse generally meant that the parish office of Overseer of the Poor was abolished and all poor relief was administered through a Board of Commissioners appointed by the county. But the ‘French’ had long had their own Overseers and they would continue to need them if they didn’t have the option of a poorhouse. Special provincial legislation would be necessary to allow this.

These considerations prompted a motion to further postpone action, countered by majority opinion that it was high time to move on the matter. Legally, the county could have forced all the towns and parishes to pay for the home, but, in a laudable spirit of democratic compromise, a solution that seems to have pleased everyone one was found in the proposal to create an Almshouse District within the county, to be comprised of the Parishes of Botsford, Westmorland, Sackville, Dorchester, and Salisbury, the Towns of Sunny Brae and Sackville, and the Village of Port Elgin (the first incorporated village in the province). The City of Moncton and the Parishes of Moncton and Shediac were to be left out of it, as they had wished. The pro-

vincial government would be asked for special legislation permitting the continuation of the French Overseers of the Poor and the exemption of all 'French' subjects from any liability in the construction or maintenance of the new Municipal Home.

By the end of the January 1927 session the legal obstacles had been cleared. In the July session the Municipal Home District was formally established and the purchase of the Smith property authorized. Councilor Palmer took the opportunity once again to emphasize that "one of the principal reasons for purchasing this property was to take advantage of the gaol labour in carrying on the work and in the interest of the institution." The final price for the house and twenty acres was \$3000. The session also authorized the borrowing of up to \$15,000 to buy the property and erect a building to house the inmates. Construction got underway early in 1928. In the January session it was already clear that the cost estimates were too low, and another \$5,000 loan was authorized. Ambrose Wheeler was contracted to erect the rather handsome brick attachment to the original house that still stands. When the architect's fees, etc. were added, it came in at just under \$17,000. A septic tank, well, electric fixtures, beds and other essentials including a cow drove the final cost up to \$23,995.17.



Whether prison labour was employed in the construction of the new building, and/or used for a time on the poor farm thereafter, is impossible to say with absolute certainty. The record of the County Council, the only place where the answer would likely be found, is no longer preserved after 1929 (or if it is I can't find it in the provincial archives). However, both Bessie Chapman and Ernie Partridge, whose memory of the Municipal Home also goes back to the early 1940s, are sure that no prisoners ever worked either on the farm or around the Home at that

time, and they never heard tell of it happening earlier. So the likelihood is that Palmer's idea—one of the main arguments for the Dorchester location—was quietly dropped, either before it could be implemented or very soon thereafter. As in other such institutions, some of the able-bodied inmates of the Municipal Home may have worked on the farm, which consisted of the twenty acres of the Smith property and another twenty-seven acres of marsh acquired some time before Bessie's parents became Farm Manager and Matron in 1942. But there were no prisoners. As we will see, by the time the Smiths assumed their duties, very little of the labour, whether in the Home or on the farm, was performed by the inmates either.

With the history lesson under our belts, we can now turn to Bessie's memories of the Westmorland County Municipal Home. As an added bonus, I also interviewed Ernie Partridge whose mother worked there for a time with Bessie's mom. As a boy he often played in the barns and was able to add some interesting details on the farm as well as on some of the inmates.

Although municipal homes were a big improvement over the old dole and boarding out system—to say nothing of the forced labour and indentured servitude of the previous century—they were by no means all perfect models of loving care. General oversight was entrusted to a Board of three Commissioners appointed by the County Council from among its members and they in turn hired a Manager for the farm and a Matron for the home. Bessie's father was the Manager and her mother was the Matron. Before they were hired, the policy was to pay the Manager and Matron a fixed sum out of which they were to feed the inmates—in other words the same arrangement as under the old boarding-out system. The people that ran the Home before the Smiths were less than generous in the amount they spent on the inmates. They gave them hash every night for supper (basically, just fried potatoes) and oatmeal porridge whenever they wanted it. A lot of them just ate the oatmeal porridge. The Smiths said they weren't going to do it this way, and Mrs. Smith took it up with the Board of Commissioners who then authorized a separate food budget for the inmates. From then on everyone got three square meals a day.

They were good meals, too. Mrs. Smith was an excellent cook and she did a lot of it herself, with the help of Bessie and one of the female inmates. Her reputation went well beyond the Home itself. There was no restaurant worthy of the name in Dorchester at that time and the lawyers from Moncton and other places coming down to the courts and land registry office would often show up at mealtimes, sometimes by the dozen. They didn't bother to phone to say they were coming, but would just knock on the door. So Mrs. Smith always had to keep the pots full because she never knew how many would be eating besides the inmates and her family. Apparently, the lawyers considered the meals one of

their perquisites, as they never paid for them.

Another bunch that benefited from free meals, but with much more justification, were the transients, popularly known as 'hoboes', who were quite common well into the 1950s. They knew the Dorchester Home as one of the places they could get something to eat—some even had maps showing all the places in the country that would give them handouts. The Smiths never turned anyone away. They would feed them and send them off with a lunch, and no doubt with fond memories of Dorchester and its culinary delights.

Another reason for the quality of the meals besides Mrs. Smith's cooking skills and the family's determination to treat the inmates well was the farm, which supplied an abundance of meat, dairy products and vegetables. The previous Manager had neglected it, but under the Smiths it was extremely well managed according to Ernie, who now owns the land. It had two big barns, one for the horses (there was no tractor; all the farming was done with horses), one for the cows and a smaller one for the pigs. And they were nicely kept up. Ernie particularly remembers the neatly painted door latches. Of course there was also a henhouse, actually a double one with the pullets on one end and the layers on the other. The large garden was in a sheltered spot with its own microclimate and it even had its own well for watering during dry spells. Its table corn, at least, must have had a local reputation for excellence. Bessie remembers that it had to be planted in the middle of the garden, hidden by surrounding stalks of field corn for the cows, as otherwise people would steal it. Large quantities of potatoes and turnips (for the cows as well as the people) were also grown in a separate field and Mrs. Smith canned up large quantities of vegetables for the winter. In short, the Home produced most of its own food—and it was organic to boot. Mr. Smith made all the farming decisions and worked with two hired men, Cal Halfpenny, a black man, and Aubery Card, who later became Farm Manager after Mr. Smith died. A few of the male inmates could also be set to simple tasks such as feeding the pigs, but they had to be supervised.

This leads to the question: what kind of people were admitted to the Municipal Home? The short answer is: only those who were utterly incapable of looking after themselves and had no other place to go. Before the Smiths' time in it, almshouses had served a wider clientele, including able-bodied but unemployable poor as well as unwed mothers and their children, all of whom could be set to work. But the end of the Depression and new government programmes such as the old age pension (1927) and Family Allowance (1944) had largely taken care of these types, leaving mainly what were unkindly, but not inaccurately, called 'mental defectives', most of them unable to perform even the simplest of tasks. (Rumour had it that a lot of them were the product of incest.) Many were ill or disabled as well, and needed full time care. So,

when the Smiths ran it, the Municipal Home was no longer a classic almshouse and workhouse but basically an understaffed nursing home with a farm attached to help cover the costs of maintaining it.

This is not to say that all the inmates were incapable of useful work. Ruby, a woman of mature years whose parents were also in the Home, helped with the cooking and housecleaning, although she had bouts of insanity that required periodic stays in the Saint John Insane Asylum. She was an obsessive cleaner who, in spite of Mrs. Smith's urgings to go to bed, would wash walls and scrub floors all night until she had worked herself into a nervous breakdown. Then it would be time for another trip to Saint John. It was sad to see, but the women's ward was kept absolutely spotless.

Another example of someone not totally incapacitated was Read W. "He didn't have much of a mind," Bessie remembers, but he was a "kind old soul" who sometimes did babysitting as well as simple chores around the farm such as filling up the livestock watering troughs with a garden hose. (He could only do this under supervision and was unable to curl the hose back up.) Ernie remembers him as a "great old fellow" who did everything all bent over. He loved his little jobs, and he particularly loved the animals. He had names for all of them and spent a lot of time talking to them, much to the amusement of some of the local lads.

Those who were able were allowed to wander in the village, and of course they added to the local cast of 'characters'. As was common in less sensitive times, they were often given nicknames that suggest they were objects of amusement rather than compassion. Ernie remembers one called 'Yonder Kid', although not why he was called that. He loved to watch the cars go by and though he could neither read nor write he knew the make and model of every one of them, much to general amazement. Another was called "Screwball." He spent a lot of his time up on the "reef of rock" or "rock ridge" that runs behind the property. There he had a special place where he would sit all day and whittle canes, oblivious to the flies and mosquitoes buzzing around him. He would fit each cane with a piece of copper tubing for a handle and if he didn't like the finished product he would throw it in the bush. One known as 'Hick' wandered constantly through every corner of the village. One day he came back early to the Home to report a dead man lying in a street. He turned out to be one of the local drunks who was merely having a little 'rest'. A number of others liked to go down to one of the stores but were unable to find their way back if they did, so Mrs. Smith would accompany them when she could find some spare time.

But these were the exceptions. Most of the inmates were confined by their disabilities to the Home and the immediate grounds around it. As in a nursing home, quite a few were confined to their room, while some spent most of their day in a chair. They could do little or nothing for themselves, including dressing, bathing and in many cases even eating. They did not have individual, or even double, rooms. The Home was divided into a men's and a women's ward with four upstairs bedrooms in each. There were twenty-eight inmates in total, so there was an average of about four to a bedroom. However, this is not an exact figure, as, interestingly enough, there were usually a few more men than women—just the opposite of today's nursing homes—so the men were a bit more crowded. The downstairs was divided into two big rooms where the inmates sat and smoked. They could also watch TV after that marvel became available in the 1950s. The first one was donated by the Shepody Chapter of the I.O.D.E. At the back was a hospital room, complete with three hospital beds for anyone who was sick—and a lot of them were. Mrs. Smith was a trained practical nurse and the Home also had access to the penitentiary physician, Dr. Burke, who made house calls. After he got too old to do it, they brought in a doctor from Sackville, usually Dr. Hirtle, Dr. Barnhill or Dr. McFarlane.

As can well be imagined, it was a lot of hard work looking after all these unfortunates, yet the Smiths did most of it themselves. And this was at a time when there were no walkers, so they more or less had to carry the most disabled inmates to the table and back to their rooms. Besides managing the farm, Mr. Smith supervised all the men's bathing, as Mrs. Smith did the women's. She also did a lot of the cleaning herself—to say nothing of the cooking, planning, administrating, nursing, and general care giving for twenty-eight hapless souls in addition to looking after her own family. (Imagine a hospital or nursing home administrator doing that today.) It certainly was no forty-hour a week job. The Smiths started work at 5:00 am and often didn't get to bed before 10:00 or 11:00 pm—and there were no weekends off. True, they did indulge themselves in a week's vacation at the shore every summer, but then Bessie took over and managed everything herself with only a bit of extra hired help. Finally, the county provided a full time assistant—a little hunchback named Marguerite—to serve the food, clear the tables and help wash the dishes. She relieved at least some of the burden and in time became a cherished member of the Smith family. She continued to live with Mrs. Smith for a number of years after the Home closed.

With so few hands to do even the basic care giving, it's small wonder that there was little entertainment or amusement apart from what the inmates could provide for themselves, and a few of them were surprisingly adept at this. One of them, a deaf mute who had no fingers except one grafted onto her left hand, could nonetheless do fancy needlework on sugar or flour bags that Mrs. Smith bleached out for her. A few others could knit or crochet. Once a month, some Moncton members of the Gideon Bible Society held a service in the Home, a gesture that was greatly appreciated, as the inmates were generally unwelcome in the local churches. The Smiths also put on a wonderful Christmas party. The Sackville Citizens' Band gave a concert and the Girl Guides—one of them was Judy—came to sing carols. It was the highlight of the year and keenly anticipated by all who were capable of anticipating anything. But there was neither time nor resources to do much else in the way of "occupational therapy." Certainly, there were no regular programmes or activities such as walking, bowling, singing, Bingo, etc. that are common in the better quality nursing homes today. The best that can be said is that, thanks to the Smiths who did their level best to care for the inmates as humanely as their limited resources would allow, it was a big improvement over what had gone on before. As another example of their compassion, twice a year Mrs. Smith went to Moncton to buy new clothes for everyone, and she made sure their charges had something a bit fancier than overalls and T shirts to wear on Sunday.

For all this effort, which appears to have resembled a religious vocation rather than a normal job, the Smiths were paid only a very modest salary and got to live in the original house for free. After Mr. Smith died Mrs. Smith stayed on as Matron until the Home closed in 1967, and Aubery Card became Farm Manager. Thus ended twenty-five years of faithful, devoted and loving service under working conditions that few would put up with today. During the 1960s great changes came to the social services system of New Brunswick, and we can be thankful for them, however much they may still leave to be desired. Whether they were capable of expressing it or not, many of Westmorland County's most unfortunate also had cause for gratitude to the Smiths for providing a level of care that went well beyond the usual standards of this antiquated and unlamented institution, the poorhouse.

*Gene Goodrich with Judy Morison*



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**Museum Hours**

June 9 to Sept. 8 2018

Tuesday to Saturday

10:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Sunday 12:00 to 5:00 p.m.

PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

The Westmorland Historical Society is a non-profit charitable organization founded in 1960 with the mandate to collect, preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage of Westmorland County, NB. For five decades the WHS has worked with local partners to apply this mandate in a unique *entrepreneurial way* by encouraging *self-financing historic sites* attracting visitors from across North America. The historic Sir Pierre Landry House, the Bell Inn, and the Payzant & Card Building, contain apartments or businesses that help off-set the costs of preserving these historic buildings.

The Society's stellar museums—the Keillor House Museum (1815) housing the Graydon Milton Library and Genealogical Centre— and the St. James Textile Museum, contain remarkable collections attracting genealogists, researchers and visitors from across North America.

How to become a WHS Member?

Contact Judy Morison, our Membership Secretary, at 4974 Main Street, Dorchester, NB, E4K 2Z1. (506) 379-6682. [morc@rogers.com](mailto:morc@rogers.com)

Annual Fees (Includes Newsletter)

- Individual: \$15.00
- Family: \$20.00
- Student: \$5.00
- Life: \$150.00

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NEW BUSINESSES TO OPEN AT THE BELL INN

Welcome to *Natashi Designs* and *Ketchup With That*

**Natashi Designs** will open a new retail outlet in the Bell Inn in June, catering to the quilting and crafts community. The owner, Shirley MacDowall, is hard at work repainting and reworking the space for her new business. Shirley's aim is to offer quality cotton, canvas and cross-stitch fabrics *at very affordable prices* as well as supplies and accessories of interest to sewing, knitting, quilting, and embroidery crafters. Natashi Designs' famous hand bags will also be available. Specialized workshops promoting fabric crafts will also be offered for adults and children. Contact Shirley at [Natasidesigns@gmail.com](mailto:Natasidesigns@gmail.com) or Natshi Designs on Face-Book.

**Ketchup With That** will open in June in the former Mrs. B's Take-out. Mary Gillespie will offer catering services, bake goods and 'food to go'. (Mary catered the WHS AGM with wonderful reviews.) Check out her blog and her many tips and healthy recipes at <http://www.ketchupwiththat.com/kitchen> and <http://facebook.com/ketchupwiththat> Contact her at (506) 588-9800. Her hours of operation will be posted on her blog and on FaceBook.