Westmorland Historical Society

Newsletter

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President's Message

While working in my garden yesterday, I noticed some red leaves on one of my big sugar maples. You know what that means: summer is ending and we will soon be welcoming the beautiful colours of autumn. The summer went by so fast it's hard to believe it's almost gone, but at least it gave us an opportunity to get outside after being cooped up all winter due to the pandemic. Our museums remained open all summer again, and once again visitation was down from previous years. Again, most of our normal spring and summer activities had to be canceled due to Covd19 but our staff quickly came up with new ideas for fundraising. One of them was a Yorkshire Day salad plate takeout dinner held on August 1st that raised $1060.00. We also set up a tea tent at the Summer Market hosted by Lady Smith Manor on July 24th and 25th. It brought in another $754. We also sold a number of hand-woven items produced by the St. James museum staff; as usual their beautiful tea towels went like hotcakes, although they are said to be not quite as delicious.

Gene Goodrich has written some great articles for our Newsletter. The topics include: Yvon "the Beast" Cormier, Dorchester's wrestling star; the Keillor House Courier and Ives lithograph; and the grain cradle hanging from the ceiling in the 'Coach House'. I was particularly interested to learn of the article on Yvon "the Beast" because I have been a wrestling fan since I was five. Yvon was a local boy about the same age as my father and they were good friends. As a result, I spent a lot of Saturday nights with my Dad and my other siblings watching "the Beast" wrestle. I also learned all the famous wrestling names of the day. Sometimes the Beast would invite us ring side after the matches so we could meet the other wrestlers, and this was a very exciting experience for us little kids. I even got to shake hands with wrestler Rocky Johnson, father of the now famous actor "the Rock" (Dwayne Johnson). Rocky Johnson was also one of the top wrestlers of the day. I was probably only seven at the time but the memory of it sticks in my mind to this day. Yvon and his family lived up the hill from me in Dorchester for some time. My siblings and I often played with three of Yvon's sons, Robert, Richard, and Stanley, as we were all around the same age. One day, the boys got into Yvon's car, put it in neutral and coasted it down the hill to our house to play with us. Yvon was not impressed, but he soon forgave them, for they were very little. We all had good laugh over that. Besides wrestling, Yvon shared another love with my family, namely for horses. If you

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Keillor House Museum —Special Events

For updates on this year's Special Events, please check our website and/or FaceBook on a regular basis

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Museum Manager/Curator's Report

As Manager/Curator of Keillor House Museum and St. James Textile Museum I found 2021 to be another challenging year. The new normal seems to be a constant stream of ever-evolving challenges. Just when you think you have one problem solved, the situation changes and sets you off in another direction. Adaptation is the only solution.

On the positive side, the year has offered some interesting opportunities. Although visitation was up over 2020, it was still quite dismal on most days. But this allowed further and more extensive work on the collections. Dozens more large textile pieces have been photographed. Accessioning of new items into the collection has continued, and the daunting task of drawing up a full inventory has begun. This is expected to take a number of years as it involves four buildings using five separate filing systems, all combined into one digital database. Right at the start we discovered a disconcerting number of un-accessioned items. Some are proving to be quite interesting, but without the appropriate paperwork we may never find out where they came from. Still, they have made it seem like Christmas all summer long.

The adoption of a Collection Management Policy was a major milestone, in my opinion. This essential document will help guide collection management into the future. Our archives have also been extensively overhauled since repatriating a large section of them to the Keillor House from Mount Allison University Archives. Following up on archival work done in the past, we now have a searchable finding aid for the majority of our archive holdings.
Over the last year we have also acquired some very interesting pieces for our collection. Just to name a few, they include the Commission document appointing Edward Baron Chandler to be Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, a collection of Eastlake style furniture from the John Francis Teed house here in Dorchester, and an extensive collection of Masonic Lodge items originating from three different New Brunswick Lodges, including our local Sussex Lodge No. 4.

Fundraising has taken a divergent path this year with alternatives being explored and proving quite successful. Earlier in the year, an on-line auction of generously donated items attracted a lot of attention and was financially very successful. Miriam and Alice did a great job putting it together and several other volunteers helped with the execution of it. Keep your eyes open for another one coming up soon! Our participation in the Summer Market hosted by Lady Smith Manor also brought gratifying returns. There we sold two types of hot tea; Yorkshire Tea (a special Orange Pekoe blend) and Lapsang Souchong Tea (a smoked Black tea), as well as a homemade Lemon Iced Tea and our famous Rhubarb Punch. The greatest success at this event was the selling of hand-woven tea towels made on the century-old looms at St. James Textile Museum. A special thank-you to Dee, Freya, and Alice for weaving up a storm so that we could have such a great product to sell. Another successful alternative event was our Take-Out Salad Plate Dinner held on Yorkshire Day. We sold sixty-seven meals, which is more than the number of guests we could have accommodated at a sit-down dinner.

The summer staff team has been exceptional again this year. They have all been dedicated, hardworking team members that stepped up to meet the challenge in this unusual season. Thank you all for helping make every day interesting:

Annika Williams returned to us for fourteen weeks through a program called Future Ready NB administered by Mount Allison University. Annika herself applied for the funding of this internship, and it has been a tremendous help with collections work.

Mary Summerby joined us for thirteen weeks through a Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages position with Federal funding.

Freya Milliken returned to us for twelve weeks through a Young Canada Works in Heritage position with Federal funding.

Julia Gill joined us for eight weeks through a Canada Summer Jobs position with Federal Funding.

Elijah Fournier joined us for eight weeks through a Canada Summer Jobs position with Federal Funding.

I was again able to use the Community Museums Summer Employment Program funding from the Province to help fund positions for both Alice Folkins and Dee Milliken. Being able to draw on this funding has been tremendously helpful.

In closing I would like to thank the Westmorland Historical Society for continuing to support me in the work I do. See you again next year!

Donald Alward, Museum Manager/Curator

didn't see Yvon in the wrestling ring he was likely at a local horse pulling event. These are my memories of Dorchester's wrestling icon. Gene's article goes into more details on the Beast's legendary wresting career, and I am sure you will find it entertaining.

Events:

We plan on having a several events this fall. Our Online Keillor House auction will take place on September 25th and 26th. The last one did so well that we decided to do a second one. Alice tells me that there will be lots of interesting Royal family related items to bid on, so check our Keillor House Museum Online Auction Facebook page for updates.

We also plan to revive our annual Victorian Dinner, which was cancelled last year because of Covid. If there are no new restrictions forcing us to cancel again, it will be on November 27th and December 4th. The price is $75 per plate, with a donation receipt issued for $20.00. Updates on these events will be found on our Facebook page and website.

We will also have a booth at the Lady Smith Manor Christmas Market on November 20th and 21st. Unfortunately, we did have to cancel our Halloween Haunted House as it always attracts such a large number of people that it would be impossible for our staff to maintain Covid19 standards.

There will be a Strategic Planning meeting sometime this fall to review our long-term strategic plan, but the date for it has not yet been set.

Collections and Museum Activities:

Our Museum Manager/Curator, Donald Alward, and our Supervisor of the St. James Textile Museum, Denyse Milliken, have submitted excellent detailed reports on all our museum activities over the summer, so it is only left to me to urge you to read them in this issue of the Newsletter.

Graydon Milton Trust and Other Investments:

The Trust's portfolio remains fully invested and the Society has set up two new investment accounts with the Royal Bank from the Landry House proceeds. The purpose of these new accounts is to generate long-term funds for capital projects as well for our operations.

Properties Updates:

The Bell Inn is fully rented and the Payzant-Card Building has only one vacant apartment, which will be rented by September 30th. Our two biggest maintenance projects for the near future are re-roofing the back of Keillor House and all of the St. James Museum. Keillor House will be done in September and St. James either this fall or next spring. Treasurer Jeff Hovey obtained a grant of $5778 from the New Brunswick Built Heritage Program for the Keillor House project, which will go quite a way towards meeting the total cost of $10,750. We are in the process of applying for a similar grant for St. James.

Acknowledgments and Announcements:

I would like to thank Donald Alward, our Manager/Curator, and Denyse Milliken, Supervisor of the St. James Textiles Museum, for their continuing dedication to our museums and to the Westmorland Historical Society in general. On a more somber note, Jeff Hovey has found it necessary to resign from our board owing to a plethora of other commitments. Jeff was great with numbers and also a great support for me when he reviewed all financial reports. He will be missed. Alice Folkins has stepped down from her position as Historical Properties Manager, one that she has filled with distinction for the last forty-four years. She deserves a rest, but her absence will be long and keenly felt. I am currently acting property manager until we find her replacement. However, she will be staying on at the museum during the summer to help Donald and also to volunteer for our special events. This is a tremendous relief, as she will no doubt continue to be a pillar of support for the Society. It is hard to imagine it without her.

I would also like to thank Miriam Andrews of Lady Smith Manor for inviting us to set up outdoor booths at the Manor's events. They were very successful and contributed considerably to our own coffers.

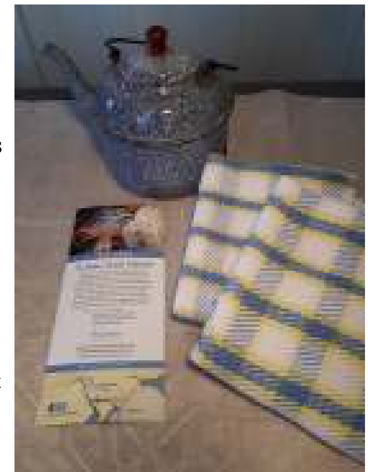
Thanks and congratulations to all of our staff, volunteers, and board members for helping us get through another challenging year. I look forward to seeing at least some of you at our fall events.

Bonnie Swift, President

St. James Museum Supervisor's Report

It has been an interesting couple of summers at St. James Textiles Museum during the pandemic. Usually in June, we would be receiving guests from Europe, mostly Germany, France, Holland, and the British Isles. By July, we'd be welcoming people from other parts of Canada, and some from the United States. In August, people from all over North America and Europe would come to Dorchester Cape to see the sandpipers, and many would also visit our museums while in the area. But this has not been the case for the past two years.

Last summer, we had to put protocols in place to protect both staff and the artifacts. Sanitizers and masks were the order of the day for everyone. Since we are a 'hands-on' as well as a 'viewing' museum, we had to make changes to our usual guided tour. We could no longer allow visitors to touch and experience items in the Beachkirk Collection. There were no impromptu spinning lessons on Betty's Louet S15 spinning wheel, and visitors could not try their hand at weaving on our 2-shaft table loom. No one knew what the pandemic would bring to the East Coast, so we were careful, vigilant, and cautiously optimistic that this would all end soon. Yet, here we were again this summer, taking the same precautions.



We remained open for tours, but of course visitation was down. Even after July, when some of the restrictions were lifted, we did not welcome hordes of visitors. Freya and I compensated by doing a lot of weaving, and I am glad to report that we sold much of our work. We posted progress pictures on our St. James Textiles Museum Facebook page, followed by photos of the finished tea towels, and were consistently and pleasantly surprised to see them sold by the end of day! You may be interested in our production process. Because it takes about two days to get the looms ready for weaving, we load the table looms to weave six towels at a time. Each batch takes about ten days from start to finish. After weaving it, we take the fabric from the loom and inspect it carefully for ends to be needle-woven in—or other little details. Next we wash it in the washing machine and dry and iron its entire length. Then we prepare the hems with a zigzag stitch on the sewing machine, cut the towels apart, and press and sew the hems. Finally, after another pressing and a second inspection for stray threads, the work is ready for sale. Our towels were in high demand last summer (2020). We sold forty-four of them at $20 each and so raised some much-needed funds that are especially welcome since WHS was unable to hold our usual fundraising events at the museums.

Having fewer visitors also allowed us to get some other work done at St. James. Donald was able to photograph and document many of the textiles in the collections of both museums. He did this by setting up a large framework along the north wall by the entryway on which to hang quilts, coverlets, sheets, and throws so that they could be photographed to advantage. He and I then seized this opportunity to select twelve bed coverings for display in the museum. This was something I had wanted to do for several years, but we didn't have the time during the season to choose and design the display. We selected six quilts, four hand-woven coverlets, one hand- crocheted bedspread, and one hand-knitted bed canopy, not only as examples of their type of handwork, but also for their beauty and the remarkable skills demonstrated by their creators. The hand-woven coverlets chosen are beautiful examples of overshot weaving, while another coverlet features a wonderfully textured design incorporating two weights of weft on a diagonal texture of pile weave. The edge of this piece is finished with a hand-knitted lace trim. The crocheted bedspread features 'motif work', whereby the artisan makes a series of motifs—in this case a beautiful flower design—and then crochets the individual pieces together to make a larger textile. The canopy bed cover is knitted in alternating squares sewn together and trimmed with a knitted lace edge. If you haven't been able to see these gems due to the pandemic restrictions, we certainly hope you will be do so next summer.

We also have on display a pieced quilt, an appliqued quilt, one that is both pieced and appliqued, a tied quilt, a crazy quilt, and a commemorative signature quilt featuring applique and embroidery made by the Mt. Allison University Women's Club in 1967 to commemorate the Centennial of Canadian Confederation. The Centennial quilt was designed by Pamela Black and is a very nice piece indeed to have in our collection.

The 2021 season arrived with much uncertainty, mixed with a little bit of hope. At least we knew what to expect, so we set to work weaving tea towels again. Our plan was to double our output from last summer, so it was decided to add another loom to the production schedule and not to weave a throw blanket on the floor loom. Both our table looms were loaded. One went to the Keillor House kitchen for Alice Folkins (yes, she also weaves!) while our Millville loom, which was donated to us the previous year, was restored and put into operation. This turned out to be something of a daunting task. The donors told us that it had been sitting in their garage for twenty-five years after they bought it at an auction. Who knows how long it had been since it was in operation? All the metal parts were rusty, so neither of the beams would move, while both roller and treadle cords were next to impossible to work with. We also discovered that the loom frame itself was a little bit out of square, and the beater out of alignment. After much oiling, tweaking and McGyvering (is that actually a word? well it is now!) we were able to load it to weave two tea towels at a time, side by side, for a total of twelve towels on the warp. At first, the weaving went slowly, but as I got to know the loom better the pace picked up, the joy of working with it increased, and all was ready in time for the Summer Market at Lady Smith Manor—despite the fact that we started weaving later than usual this summer. Thirty towels finished in twenty days! This was a record for your 'production weavers' at St. James.

We also added another loom to the collection this summer. It was donated by the Agricultural Museum in Sussex, which had decided to focus on the farm tools in its collection. Known as "the Kars Loom" because it came from the community of Kars just north of Belle Isle Bay, it is approximately the same width as our 250-year-old barn loom, but has a smaller "footprint" so that it takes up a little less space. It also has some interesting design characteristics that suggest a Dutch, or possibly a Scandinavian, origin. Instead of having cords suspending the horses from the top roller of the loom, it has leather straps. In the course of my researches I have come across Vincent Van Gogh paintings depicting Dutch weavers using looms with similar set ups. This loom also has a very heavy beater with a curve to the much thicker top portion, which is typical of Eastern European looms built in the 1800's. Most barn looms do not have lamms (horizontal wooden attaching rods) between the shafts and treadles. However this loom came with two pieces whose function was unknown to the donors. I suspect that they are part of the upper arrangement for suspending and controlling the shafts—perhaps the harnesses which work in tandem with the horses—but haven't yet had time to investigate and set up this loom for weaving. It arrived with its original reeds, made of flattened reed material set between two wooden rods and wrapped in cloth. We also have the original string heddles (wires separating the warp threads so that the weft can pass between them), which appear to be knitted and not made individually. This loom does not have a built-in seat like our barn loom does.

I have missed dyeing wool over the fire at our annual Heritage Craft Fair and hand-spinning wool into yarn this summer. Circumstances have dictated that my time be dedicated almost entirely to weaving. This has not been a bad thing, but I look forward to more variety again next year. We have also missed our "Needle and Thread for the Bed," and hope that it, too, will return someday.

As the season comes to a close this year, it is my hope that next year will bring some sense of normalcy to us all.

Denyse Milliken, Supervisor St. James Textiles Museum

Remembering Dorchester's Beloved 'Beast'

Editor's Note: The following piece was inspired by our Research Associate, Jamie Heap, who not only came up with the topic, but gathered a great deal of information on the Cormier brothers' remarkable wrestling careers (including the pictures), not all of which could be included here. Your faithful editor interviewed Ernie "the Oracle" Partridge, scooped up a few chance remarks by Alice Folkins, did some (online) research on professional wrestling, and massaged the final narrative. We hope you like the result.

Over the years, Dorchester has produced many colourful characters that made their mark on the world, and they came from a variety of backgrounds. Edmund Barron Chandler, Albert J. Smith, Henry Read Emmerson, and Pierre-Amand Landry were lawyers and politicians, as were a number of others. The Palmer brothers, Robert Andrew Chapman, and William Hickman were shipbuilders and merchants. Charlie McEwen, whose story we told some time ago in these pages, was an inventor, a real estate developer, and a businessman. Douglas How was a writer and Canadian editor of the *Reader's Digest*. But, the most unlikely field of endeavour on which a native son of a small Maritime village could make his mark and gain fame both at home and abroad was professional wrestling. Yet, it was world-class professional wrestling champion Yvon "the Beast" Cormier who probably did the most of anyone to put Dorchester on the map in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Our Memramcook friends may think it a bit of a stretch to claim the Beast as a native son of Dorchester, but there is a case to be made for it. He grew up on a farm at Breau Creek, which is just about half way between 'downtown' College Bridge and 'downtown' Upper Dorchester. So, at the very least we can say that we share him with Memramcook. Moreover, he married a girl who lived right in the Village of Dorchester, just a few houses away from our living source of shiretown history, Ernie Partridge. Before she married the Beast, Doris Lorette often babysat for the Partridges. Yvon was a good friend of Ernie's, as well as of Eugene Weldon's and all the other Dorchester types with whom he shared a love of horses. In fact, it was the horses that made the Beast part of the Dorchester community, and the Beast who made himself beloved in it. Yvon Comier was a true Dorchester character deserving of an honoured place in the village's history.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, Dorchester was the scene of an annual horse pull that attracted horses and horse lovers from all over the province and many parts of Nova Scotia as well. Three weight classes of horses competed: light, middleweight and heavyweight. All pulls were judged on a pound for pound basis. The horses were weighed at the beginning of the pull and hitched to a sled that weighed exactly 1000 pounds. Weights were then added in successive 400-pound increments until the horse, or team in the case of doubles, couldn't pull any more. The winners in each class were the ones that pulled the most over their own weight. The Beast was a regular competitor at these events, usually accompanied by his large family that included two brothers who were also professional wrestlers. He tried very hard to win in at least one of the weight classes and spent a lot of money acquiring fine competitive horses, many of them from the Mennonites in Ohio and Pennsylvania, but he never quite made it. He took it in good part, though, because, to him, even more important than winning was the fellowship he enjoyed with the other contestants, and with the many people in the community who shared his love of horses, which in his case bordered on fanaticism. Indeed, one of the reasons he never took first place in these events may well have been, according to Alice Folkins who remembers them well, that he never yelled at or whipped his horses, as did some of the other contestants—something that displeased many of the spectators. The organizers of the horse pulls (Ernie was among the main ones) were always glad to see the Beast and his horses at these events, not only because he was a friendly guy and everyone liked him, but also because he was almost as much of an attraction as the horses. You see, there were a lot of wrestling fans in Dorchester and environs at that time, and the Beast, along with his three wrestling brothers, was a home-grown favourite who was also an internationally recognized champion.

Details on how the Beast and his brothers got into professional wrestling are sketchy, but it all seems to have started with the genetics of Edmond and Bernadette Cormier, who raised thirteen children on their farm in Memramcook. Nine of them were boys and of these, five were extraordinarily strong. Besides toiling in the lumber camps during the winter, pushing and pulling felled trees onto sleds, their favourite activities included hoisting large boulders onto wagons, lifting the back end of the farm pickup off the ground, and whatever else they could think of to show off their

strength. No doubt they were formidable contenders in the recess and after-school wrestling matches that were a standard feature of the schoolyard scene before they were banned by a more prudish and 'uptight' generation of school administrators, along with snowball fights and other harmless high jinks. At some point, the Cormier boys came to the notice of Emile Dupree, a local wrestler and wrestling promoter who was always on the lookout for new talent. At this point we must pause to set the wresting scene in the Maritimes from the early 1950s to the late 1980s.

Before the 1920s, wrestling, as it was developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans and revived in the nineteenth century along with the other Olympic Games, was a genuinely competitive sport, as it still is in amateur wrestling. Contestants trained as individuals using their own name, and matches were won or lost strictly on the basis of their skills in the ring. However, there is a reason why wrestling was watched with less excitement than was boxing, running, discus and javelin hurling, and other 'fast action' sports. According to its rules, matches were won either by pinning the opponent's shoulders to the mat or by getting him into a hold painful enough to make him "cry uncle." Given the many tricky ways to break a hold and the fact that much of the 'action' consisted of slow straining and jockeying for position, this could take a long time. World Title matches often lasted five or six hours and ended in stalemate, with the result that, apart from the truly devoted, most sports fans decided they would rather watch paint dry. At this point things began to change in order to compete with the bloodier and more exciting sport of professional boxing, which became all the rage during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

About 1925, when the current wrestling champion proved impossible to beat, he staged a loss just to drum up interest. It worked, and over the next two decades professional wrestling was transformed into a carefully choreographed spectacle whose main objective was (and still is) to excite the crowd and drive up ticket sales. It fell under the management of 'promoters' who recruited the wrestlers and organized matches within a recognized territory called a 'promotion'. These typically included a dozen or so American states and Canadian provinces. Naturally, the promoters sold tickets to the matches and gave out prize money to the winners. They also established championships for their promotions, signified by a specially designed belt worn by the champion. The wrestlers recruited by the 'promotion' contended for the championship, or with fellow non champions for the right to challenge the champion. To maintain—or better yet to whip up—spectator interest, it was desirable (and profitable) to have frequent (but not too frequent) changes of title holder so that more matches could be billed as 'championship' or 'title'. To get around the problem that serious wrestling matches between evenly matched opponents are inherently boring to watch, the promoters decided in advance who was going to win and how they were going to do it. Rather than long-drawn-out holds and jockeyings for position, they encouraged spectacular leaps and bounces off the ropes (or better yet from on top of them), feigned kicks and punches, hair pulling, and whatever else they thought could excite the spectators' blood lust. Most importantly of all, they developed a storyline that turned the wrestling match—indeed even a series of matches—into a dramatic struggle between a hero, or at least a 'good guy', and a villain, or 'bad guy'. Wrestlers would generally fall into one or the other of these classes, depending on their looks and general demeanour. Since heroes were traditionally supposed to be handsome and clean-shaven, they came to be called 'babyfaces' in the wrestling world, and later just 'faces', while the villains were—and still are—known as 'heels'. It would not do for heroes to win all the time, at least not too easily, as that, too, could lead to ennui. Spectators wanted them to win, of course, but, in order to maintain suspense heels were scripted to have the upper hand until the very end of the match. The drama could also be stretched out over a series of matches and the suspense heightened if the heel won most of them until the grand finale. The whole idea of the script became to get spectators emotionally involved in the drama, and this could be enhanced if the heel won with illegal holds, or surreptitious 'low blows' (ostensibly) intended to injure the 'face'. The heel's villainous antics would be facilitated by the referee, who literally got into the act. His job was/is to enforce the rules of fair play and declare victory when one of the contestants has pinned his opponent, or defeat if he is disqualified by an illegal maneuver or dirty trick. But the most basic rule was/is that the referee must *see* the action before delivering a judgment. Heels took (scripted) advantage of this by distracting him or even knocking him out with a sucker punch 'not seen' by other officials and then freely violating the rules until he is revived or replaced. Of course, the storyline is enhanced if the wrestlers, whether 'faces', 'heels', or something in between, take on a highly individual and easily recognizable character. This was/is accomplished with nicknames or by-names such as "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Randy "Macho

Man" Savage, "Nature Boy" Buddy Roger (an obvious 'face'), "Gorilla" Monsoon, "Hulk" Hogan, etc. To 'build character', as it were, details of the wrestlers' private lives, or stories about them, were/are circulated in wrestling magazines and other media with the intention of creating followings or fan clubs whose attendance at matches greatly increased the excitement, especially if they were those of opponents supposed to be carrying on a personal feud outside the ring as well as in it.

After it became professionalized, wrestling turned into what critics would call a phony spectacle, but that didn't /doesn't make the crowds turn away. One reason is that, until quite recently, promoters denied that the matches were scripted and many spectators believed them. But even those who knew, or suspected, that all was not what it appeared to be enjoyed the drama, just as they would an action movie even though the 'action' is fictitious and often impossible in real life. And, whether they thought the action was for real or not, everyone admired the wrestlers' performance skills (in playing their scripted parts) and their awesome athletic prowess, both of which were/are indeed very real. Not just anybody can become a professional wrestler. Besides prodigious strength, genuine athletic ability (flexibility, quick reflexes, etc.) is necessary, along with dedication to a rigourous training programme and, perhaps above all, a capacity to endure pain and accept injury. Although the action was/is choreographed and the outcome predetermined, the leaps and falls onto hard surfaces are very real and, unlike stage fighting as in a play, there is actually a high chance of injury, especially to the shoulders, knees, back, neck and ribs. As one professional wrestler said in an interview a few years ago, "We train to take damage. We know we are going to take damage and we accept that." So, although the storyline was/is fictional and the outcome predetermined by the promoters, that doesn't mean that the decisions were/are arbitrary and therefore unrelated to the skills of the wrestlers, only that those skills are performance as well as athletic. Behind the scenes, bookers award the championship in their promotion to their most accomplished performer, or the one they believe will generate the most fan interest. 'Winning' multiple titles or keeping a title for a long time was/is a genuine indication of a wrestler's ability both as an athlete and as a performer. Like other athletes, but also like movie stars, singers, and other performers, the best of them can become legends. Thus, when the Cormier boys decided to take up professional wrestling, it wasn't with a view to a soft and easy life based on deceiving the rubes. It was a career choice that opened up opportunities beyond what a Memramcook Valley farm could offer. They took them, and went far with them, but they never broke off their attachment to their native soil.

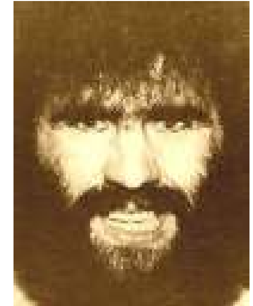
The first of the Cormiers to take up professional wrestling was Malcolm, the oldest, and the one who paved the way for his brothers. He wrestled locally with the Emile Dupree promotion and then for a while in Boston, but without notable success. He (or the promotion) decided that his real talents lay in refereeing, a role in which he became "about the best," according to his promoters. When he wasn't refereeing he worked in the local area as a bricklayer and later as a guard at the Provincial Jail in Dorchester (after it was no longer the county jail). Malcolm died in 2011.

Malcolm was followed into the ring by four of his brothers, Jean-Louis, Romeo, Leonce, and Yvon. Jean-Louis was given the ring name 'Rudy Kay' by a Chicago promotion for whom he wrestled, apparently because of his resemblance to a retired wrestler of that name. Romeo followed suit and became 'Bobby Kay', while Leonce decided that 'Leo Burke' would be more palatable than 'Leonce Cormier' to largely Anglophone and American spectators. Besides performing in singles matches and being awarded numerous titles by the satisfied promotions with whom they were associated, the Cormier lads often wrestled together as a 'tag team'. Members of a tag team wrestle against an opposing team, but according to the rules (which are frequently broken to stir up spectator outrage) only one competitor per team is allowed in the ring at any one time. When he tires or is about to be defeated, he 'tags' one of his teammates, usually by a palm-to-palm hand slap resembling the 'high five' of current popular culture. This also allows teams to mix and match the skills of the individual members and can make the match more interesting. Almost needless to say, promotions also have championships for tag teams, and the Cormiers won their share of them. Besides performing in the ring himself, 'Rudy Kay' also became a promoter, founding what he called the Eastern Sports Association in affiliation with other promotions in the eastern United States. Not surprisingly, his brothers were regular participants in the matches of this promotion.

Born in 1938, Yvon, the focus of this article, was the second oldest of the wrestling Cormiers. All the boys were immensely strong, but he was the strongest. He was the one most noted for manhandling large felled trees in the winter woods, and he could lift up the back end of the farm pick-up when he was just seventeen. Besides prodigious displays of strength in the woods and on the farm, he was the wonder of the weight room, easily bench-pressing 450 pounds—and considerably more when he put his mind to it. One of his best lifts was 527 pounds, which put him in a league with the best professional weight lifters. He is said to have been one of the strongest men in Canada in his time. There is even a legend that, as a publicity stunt, he once pulled a telephone pole out of the ground and carried it around while photographers took pictures.

When he first got into wrestling—from 1957 into the early 1960s—he was known as 'Ivan the Lumberjack', 'Pierre LeBeau'

and even ‘Joe Gump’. But soon after Emile Dupree encouraged him to go for the big leagues, he moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, for professional training and then to the “Mid-Atlantic” promotion based in North Carolina. Seeing his “thick, untamed hair and large, curly beard,” the promoters came up with a new ring name, ‘The Beast’. It soon proved to have much more fan appeal than ‘Ivan the Lumberjack’ or ‘Joe Gump’, and Yvon kept it for the rest of his career, both inside and outside the ring, including for his hotel reservations and plane tickets. However, in spite of the menacing implications of his ring name, the Beast often performed as a ‘face’. Perhaps the fans and promoters sensed what those closest to him knew well knew: that behind that homely exterior lurked his alter ego, ‘Beauty’, a genuinely kind and gentle soul.



After some time with the Mid-Atlantic promotion, the Beast moved to Calgary where he competed in the ‘Stampede Wrestling’ promotion. The promoters were so pleased with his performance that in 1966 they awarded him the Canadian Heavyweight Championship (he weighed in at just over 250 pounds). This launched him into a long and very successful career that took him on tours around the world no less than seven times. One of the tours included Australia, on which he was accompanied by his brother ‘Rudy Kay’. He came back with over $200,000 in his pocket and promptly used more than half of it to build a super luxurious barn at Breau Creek for his beloved horses. Ernie remembers that it was heated in the winter and had running water year around. After he was no longer able to look after his horses the barn was neglected. (Like that of most professional wrestlers, his life was relatively short—seventy years in his case.) Ernie says that part of the barn fell down, but Alice says that another part was turned into a house that is still standing.

Edmond and Bernadette were disappointed to the point of being heartbroken when Yvon and so many of their sons left the family farm to pursue careers in professional wrestling, but the reality of the 1950s and early 60s was that farming in the Memramcook Valley was dying out. So maybe it was for the best. However, although the boys left the farm, the farm never really left the boys, especially not the horses. They all retained a life-long interest in them, and the Beast spent a considerable portion of his earnings acquiring and pampering his beloved Percherons. He kept them at Breau Creek, to where he and his wrestling brothers returned each summer to help out on the family farm, and of course to compete in the local horse pulls. They also returned to wrestle. As noted above, there was a promotion in Atlantic Canada, the Eastern Sports Association, in which Rudy Kay acquired an interest and in which he and his brothers wrestled both as individuals and as a tag team. As late as 1999, when he was sixty years old, the Beast toured the region in Emile Dupree’s Atlantic Grand Prix Wrestling promotion. When they were back in their home territory, the Cormier boys had a lot of local fans, and some of them got pretty excited during the matches, as it still wasn’t generally known that they were staged. Ernie remembers one of them because he worked for Ernie on the dykes. He would get so angry at the heel that he “would sit there and sweat just as though he was working in the woods or the hayfield.” He simply couldn’t believe what people afterwards told him he did during the match. Even older people would “get right up in the crowd and swear at the villains.” And the Beast was a main attraction. Even when he played the heel he didn’t get booed much, according to Ernie, as “that family knew so many people. To get crowds all you had to do was advertise that the Beast was in the match, just like the horse pulls. They would be there to cheer him on.”

One Dorchesterite who was often there to cheer him on was Eugene Weldon, the local undertaker and horse fancier whose horse-drawn hearse is on display in the Keillor House ‘Carriage House’ (see the February 2017 edition of the *Newsletter*). He and the Beast became great friends through their common love of Percherons, even though Eugene didn’t much care for horse pulls, because, according to Ernie, he thought they were hard on the horses. He probably made an exception for the Beast because of the gentle way he handled his horses during the matches. During their interview with us about the hearse, Eugene’s daughters told us that their father used his tow truck to transport a portable wrestling ring around the Eastern Sports Association concession—Moncton, Fredericton, Halifax “and all those little places in between. We had wrestlers at our house all the time, such as the Stomper, Little Beaver, and other guys who used to wrestle. He knew them all.”

On May 13, 2006, the Village of Memramcook put on a special recognition night in honour of the wrestling Cormiers. They had become local legends not only for their fame as wrestlers, but also for their popularity in the community, the latter due in no small measure to the success of Bobby Kay’s country music band. All the Cormiers loved country music almost as

much as they did their horses. It is said that ten percent of the village's population turned out for the event. Seated in rocking chairs in a mock-up wrestling ring at the centre of attention were the Beast, Rudy Kay, Bobby Kay, Leo Burke, and Malcolm. Almost needless to say, their speeches to their fans and well wishers that night were emotional.

A little less than three years later, the Beast died (March 2009) at age seventy from complications following two heart attacks and bone marrow cancer. He was predeceased by Rudy Kay in May, 2008, also at age seventy, and followed by Malcolm in August, 2011 and by Bobby Kay in January, 2020, *also* at age seventy. Leo Burke (born 1948) is still living in Calgary to where he moved in 1977 to join the Stampede Wresting promotion.

As a final note of Beast nostalgia, we share a story that Alice remembers hearing some time ago. She can't verify its authenticity, but we'll tell it anyway. It seems that the Beast was out driving around the Dorchester area one night in his car, sitting rather low in the seat. A bunch of local punks mistook him in the darkness for a little old lady and decided to beat 'her' up and rob 'her'. It's not recorded if the brave lads decided to test whether the Beast that stepped out of the car to confront them was actually a Beauty inside, but, somehow, we don't think they did.

Jamie Heap and Gene Goodrich

The Keillor House Courrier and Ives Lithograph: The 'Bear' Facts

Does this look familiar? Probably not. Visitors to Keillor House don't usually pay too much attention to the curious picture hanging on one of the kitchen walls depicting a determined looking man fending off an attack by a ferocious rearing bear with his dagger while his companion takes aim at the beast from behind a tree. If they think about it at all, they probably wonder what it has to do with Keillor House and the representation of 19th century domestic life, which is the museum's main purpose. Well, for one thing it was donated by James Keillor of New York and is thus part of the early history of the museum. James Keillor (1888-1975) was an avid antique collector who somehow heard of the restoration of Keillor House as a Centennial Project. Attracted by the name, and probably thinking that he was somehow related to John Keillor (no details on what motivated him have been recorded, so I speculate), he contacted Sylvia and Mark Yeoman, two of the leading movers and shakers in WHS at that time. The upshot was that he visited Keillor House a couple of times and really hit it off with the Yeomans, who in turn visited him in New York. Impressed with the museum, he donated twenty-four objects between 1971 and 1974, including the bear. The Society's gratitude was recorded in the February 1974 issue of our *Newsletter*:"Mr. John (*sic)* Keillor of the United States, a celebrated collector of wrought iron items and a wide range of antiques, has over the past few years shown a genuine interest in Keillor House and has given numerous rare pieces for our kitchen, making it probably the most interesting collection of its kind in the Maritimes. Still he has offered to do more. To show our appreciation, Mr. Keillor has been appointed Honorary President of the Westmorland Historical Society."

James Keillor enjoyed only a short tenure as Honorary President, as he died the following year, at age eighty-seven. Whether he noted that his presidential name had been changed to John (inadvertently, I assume), is unknown. Also unknown is whether he ever discovered that he was *not* directly related to John Keillor of Dorchester. He was, rather, a descendant of the James Keillor who founded the firm that made the famous Seville Orange Marmalade in Dundee and was himself born in Scotland (in Glasgow). But that doesn't entirely exclude some kind of family connection somewhere. John Keillor, as is well known, came to the Chignecto from Yorkshire, but the name is actually Scottish, and in the generations before his father and grandfather, Scottish immigrants are known to have settled in this northern English county. So maybe James knew something about the Yorkshire Keillors that we don't.

We also have no information on why James Keillor donated the bear, but if he thought it would be appropriate to the themes of the museum, he was certainly correct. It turns out to be a genuine Currier and Ives print, and a very popular one whose identical companions in the print run once graced the walls of middle class Victorian homes throughout North America and are now on display in a number of art museums. Thomas and Mary Jane Keillor (John and Elizabeth's second son and daughter-in-law who inherited the house) could very well have had it, or one of the many other Currier and Ives prints, hanging on a wall in Keillor House.

Currier and Ives was the most prolific printmaking firm in America during the last half of the 19th century. It specialized in prints that began as lithographs, meaning that the picture was first drawn onto a polished limestone plate ('lithos' is the Greek word for stone—said the learned professor) with a fat or wax crayon. Next, a mixture of acid and gum was applied to the plate, which etched ('cut into') the parts not protected by the greasy image. When the stone plate was moistened these etched parts retained water. An oil-based ink was then spread over the plate with a roller and, because the water repelled it (oil and water don't mix), it stuck only to the drawing. (The wax was removed after the etching was completed and before the ink was applied.) A sheet of paper was placed on the plate, a weight applied, and presto! A perfect black and white print appeared, to be followed by as many others as the printmakers thought they could sell. If they had remained black and white, that probably wouldn't have been all that many, but Currier and Ives added a feature (although they didn't invent it) that, even though it drove up the cost of production somewhat, greatly enhanced the prints' appeal. Each one was individually hand-coloured (in watercolour) in assembly-line fashion by a dozen or more women, one colour to a woman. They were often immigrants fresh over from Germany, where lithography was first developed towards the end of the 18th century. Needless to say, they weren't paid top wages (they got 6 cents a print). The higher wages were reserved for the more highly skilled stone dressers, copying artists, etchers, and printers, who were usually male—but not always: Fanny (Francis Flora) Palmer, a professional lithographer from England, became one of Currier and Ives most prolific artists, designing some of the firm's most famous prints.

In comparison to steel engravings—to say nothing of original paintings—lithographic prints could be produced quickly and cheaply (photography was still in its infancy) and they soon caught on in a big way with the general public, not least because of the attractive colours that were added by the low-paid ladies. The firm billed itself as "the Grand Central Depot for Cheap and Popular Prints" and advertised its lithographs as "colored engravings for the people." And "for the people" they definitely were. The "people" bought them up in reams, much to the satisfaction and profit of the "Grand Central Depot" located in New York City. The firm produced two to three new images every week for the seventy-two years of its operation, for a grand total of at least 7,500 lithographs and more than a million hand-coloured prints. They depicted almost every aspect of American life, usually in idealized form: country scenes, city scenes, historical scenes, Mississippi and Hudson River scenes, winter scenes, gold mining, railroad and train scenes, clipper ships, politics, comedy (some of it, like the 'Darktown Comics' featuring caricatures of Negroes would be very politically incorrect today), whaling, fishing, and—of special relevance to the Keillor House print—hunting, to name just some of the themes. Currier and Ives prints soon became the most popular wall hangings of the day.

The skilled draftsmen who drew the pictures on the stone plates were seldom the original artists. Instead, they generally copied the works of celebrated painters who contracted with Currier and Ives to have their creations reproduced on lithographs and sold en masse. Most of them are not household names today, although Fanny Palmer is now celebrated in the small circle of lithograph *cognoscenti* as the first woman in the United States to make her living as a full-time artist. But a painter that did become quite well known, chiefly as a result of his association with Currier and Ives, was Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait (1819-1905), the artist who created the original of our lithograph.

Tait grew up in Liverpool and Manchester, England, where he taught himself to paint while working as a boy apprentice for a local lithography firm. After producing a number of (paintings used as models for) lithographs featuring trains and land-

scapes, he happened to meet George Catlin, an American adventurer, painter, and author who was taking a travelling exhibition of his well known paintings of the life of the Plains Indians across Europe. Tait worked with Catlin and, probably because he already had a keen interest in animals and hunting, was soon hooked on fantasies of America, particularly the Wild West. In 1850 he emigrated to New York where he painted frontier scenes in a studio, often in collaboration with well known artists of the genre, such as Louis Mauer.

In spite of his romantic attachment to the American frontier, at least on canvas, Tait never got west of Chicago. He did, however, set up a small painting camp in the Adirondacks where he spent his summers, not just painting but also developing his skills as a hunter and woodsman. This lent a note of authenticity to his hunting scenes, and also a note of drama, as they usually told an exciting story that could plausibly have happened, even if it actually hadn't. This was an excellent time to be painting hunting scenes. In the 1850s wilderness sports—camping, hunting, and fishing—were becoming increasingly popular with the American 'outdoorsy' set, boosted as they were in sporting magazines and railroad propaganda designed to lure tourists and grow ticket sales. It was his hunting scenes that first drew Tait to the attention of Currier and Ives, who saw the potential for sales if his paintings were reproduced as lithographs. In 1852 they did just that, specifically in order to publicize him, and the result was that he became one of America's most popular painters, not only of hunting and fishing scenes, but also of wildlife, game birds such as quail, and even domestic animals.

The Tait/Currier and Ives print in Keillor House is entitled *The Life of a Hunter: A Tight Fix.* It was printed in 1861 and was one of a series of "Life of a Hunter" paintings/lithographs by Tait that included a very similar one from 1856, also done up in a studio using props and generic backgrounds, entitled *A Tight Fix—Bear Hunting in Early Winter*. Here it is, courtesy of the internet. Just for handy comparison, I add a somewhat cleaner print of our own treasure:

Some readers may prefer the earlier version, and wish that James Keillor had given it to us instead of the 1861 revision. But we can take comfort in the observation that ours is a more realistic scene, even if it, too, was painted in a studio. Those with even a 'bear' knowledge of the subject will recall that bears don't normally attack from a sitting position.

Although they began as "cheap and popular prints…for the people," original Currier and Ives lithographs are much sought after by collectors today. Perhaps if we ever get into a "Tight Fix" financially, we can sell it for a bundle, assuming that we could ever 'bear' to part with it.

Gene Goodrich

CURIOSITIES OF THE COACH HOUSE: THE GRAIN CRADLE

The Keillor House 'Coach House' (it really isn't an original coach house, but a building moved here from the grounds of the old Methodist cemetery, now the Pioneer Cemetery) is best known for the Penitentiary Collection of gruesome instruments that once kept inmates on the straight and narrow. But it also houses an eclectic assortment of other interesting items that don't always get the notice they deserve. Two of them, the Weldon hearse and the 'Landau' (which turned out to be a 'Victoria', not a Landau) were discussed in the February 2017 and February 2021 issues of the *Newsletter*. There are lots of other curious items, and one that is easy to overlook—in another sense it's actually very difficult to overlook—is a strange object hanging from the ceiling. (That's why it's difficult to 'overlook'.)

To the uninitiated it may look a bit like the claw of some large and very ferocious prehistoric beast, but it's not an archaeological artifact. It is a grain cradle that was an essential tool in harvesting grain in John Keillor's time, and indeed well into the time of his son, Thomas. Our Coach House specimen probably dates from the mid to late 19th century, but we can't be sure, as our acquisitions catalogue has almost no information on it.

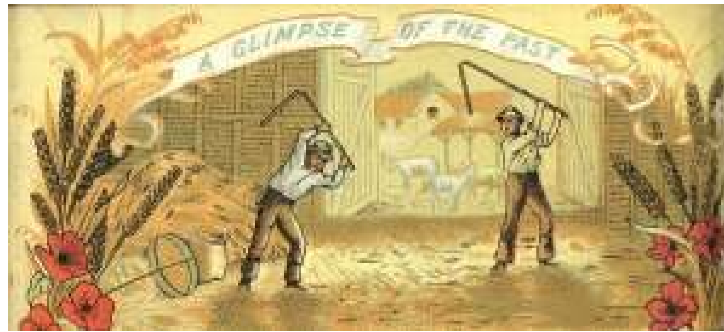
Grain could, of course, be cut with a plain scythe. This was the common practice in Europe during the early 19th century and it was a great improvement over the less efficient, even more back-breaking, sickle that had been the harvester *de choix* ever since *it* had replaced the original "yank it out" method millennia before. However, it took a lot of skill to keep the grain stems aligned where they fell using an ordinary scythe, something that was very important for efficient sheaving (which will be explained in a moment). This wasn't so much of a problem in Europe where specialized reapers who were very handy with a scythe could be hired at low wages, but it *was* in colonial North America where farmers had to be "jacks of all trades" and didn't always have the necessary scything skills to lay the grain down in straight rows. To enable relatively unskilled reapers to do that, the grain cradle was developed and attached to the blade of an ordinary scythe. As the reaper swung the scythe-cum-cradle in a sweeping cutting stroke, the grain stalks fell into the cradle with their heads up. At the end of the stroke he quickly swung it back, neatly laying the grain down in a long "windrow" with all the heads facing the same way. On the next page is a modern reconstruction of a scythe and cradle no doubt very much like the ones the Keillors (or more accurately their hired men) used.

I have definite proof that John Keillor had at least one, and probably several, grain cradles, or at least he had hired men who had them. During the years 1801-1803 he hired his nephew, Harmon Trueman of Point de Bute, to fix up his old log house and make some furniture for the family. Harmon also did some other things as at this time, including "one and a half day's cradling," according to a statement of account that I accidentally found in an archive while looking for something else entirely. A grain cradle is listed in the estate appraisal of Harmon's father, William Trueman, who also several times mentions cradling grain in a sort of diary he kept for the last twenty-odd years of his life.

While we are at it, and since there is still space to fill, we might as well finish this article with a brief description of the rest of the harvest as it probably proceeded in John Keillor's time. Unfortunately, there are no museum artifacts to go with it, but I can draw on some research I have been doing lately on William Trueman's farming operations, which would not have been very different from those of his brother-in-law.

After laying the grain down in long windrows, the next operation was 'sheaving' or tying it up into small bundles (called 'sheaves') with a handful of the stalks. The sheaves were then 'stooked', i.e. stood up on their butt ends, the grain heads skywards, and leaned together, usually in groups of six sheaves, two on each side and one at each end. The finished stook looked like this, and a field full of them was quite a pleasant sight.

The purpose of stooking was to dry the grain; if left on the ground for very long it would rot. After the stooks had stood some weeks (hopefully) in the sunshine, they were carted off the field and into the barn(s) to await threshing. I know this because there are more than a dozen references in William Trueman's 'diary' to getting grain into the barn. Most of it was threshed during the winter, except buckwheat, which was threshed in October. Trueman records indicate that much of it was done by hired men and the Trueman boys, rather than by William himself, and I am sure the same was true of John Keillor, especially after he became more prosperous and could afford to hire labour. Primitive mechanical threshers had been invented by this time, but they were rare. Certainly, none appears in Trueman's estate appraisal, which does list ploughs, harrows, and other farming equipment. So I conclude that threshing was done the way it had always been, by opening the sheaves, laying them out on a wooden platform or threshing floor, and beating the grain out with a flail. This was made of two large sticks of wood attached to each other by a chain, rope, etc. One served as a handle and was swung over the shoulder, causing the other (the 'swipple') to accelerate and strike the grain with greater force than would be possible with a single stick, as in this illustration, courtesy of Wikipedia.



After the grain was beaten out of the stalks and onto the threshing floor, it still had to be separated from the useless 'chaff', or husks, a task known as 'winnowing'. In its earliest form this was done simply by throwing the grain, together with the much lighter chaff, upwards into a steady breeze and catching the grain in a winnowing basket, something that was easily done in the open in places like ancient Egypt, where the Nile breeze is both steady (and not too strong) and reliable. This was more difficult in soggy and more blustery lands, so, as early as Anglo-Saxon times, northern Europeans had figured it out that if you open two barn doors across from each other, a nice breeze will come blowing through, ideal for winnowing. It is quite likely that this was the method used by the early Chignecto farmers, as it certainly is in the Wiki image above. However, a more reliable—and on a cold winter's day more pleasant—way of getting up a winnowing breeze was certainly known at the time. The Chinese had centuries earlier developed a hand-cranked rotary winnowing fan, and the Dutch began to import then into Europe from the Dutch East Indies early in the 18th century. It's not inherently impossible that the Truemans—and by extension the Keillors—had one, but, as with the mechanical thresher, there is no evidence of it in the Trueman estate inventory, so we will have to leave it at that. Whether they used a winnowing fan or the "open door" method of getting up a breeze, the operation probably looked a lot like this 19th century painting of a winnower:

After winnowing, the grain was stored in sacks. Leaving it in piles on the floor would have been an open invitation to rodents, insects, and other vermin, which no doubt found their way into the sacks as well, but at a lesser rate. Although there is no reference to them in the Trueman 'diary', or any other document I know of, I would bet that those parts of the barns where the grain was stored were home to a good many cats, as were, proverbially, the mills of the day. This method of threshing and winnowing still left a fair amount of grain on the threshing floor, so, unless it was all swept up, the mice, or at least those that escaped the cats, didn't starve. Farms in those days were much safer places for "all creatures great and small."

Gene Goodrich

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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.

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