

# MILL TOWN MESSENGER

Volume 18 Issue 2

April 2024

## *From the President's Pen: By Arthur Walsh*

### **The Needs of a Historical Society: The Contributions, and then a Time of Trial and Setback for the Cote Family.**

The purposes of any Historical Society include, of course, recording past events and preserving artifacts relating to them, but there is much more. Those collections may be vast and useful for specific areas of research, but to bring about the full importance of this history and bring it to relevance to the everyday life of our townspeople today requires thoughtful and careful grouping and cataloging of these photographs, printed material, and historical items, ranging from blacksmiths tools to band uniforms and sewing needle cases.

This is the thought and planning that allows these thousands of items to tell a story, to link them to our lives today and bring reflection and respect, even amazement for what was done by the people before us. This is the aspect of Historical Societies which enriches our lives, these countless hours of thought and work which render these items of years-gone-by alive and comprehensible in short visits, whether to printed newsletters or to a museum.

It is not often thought of, but one aspect of Historical Societies is to maintain themselves, so that they, like the relics they preserve, do not disappear into the "dustbin of history"! This, too, requires tremendous dedication of members and, typically, an enormous commitment of time to not only raising public awareness, but fundraising. That fundraising comes about through annual dues by members and appeals for contributions, of course, but also through substantial time spent applying for grants, paperwork supporting their tax-free organization status, and such activities as selling history related items, ranging from Christmas ornaments to informative books written by Museum members.

In every one of these categories, Jackie and Larry Cote have truly been pillars of the Newport Historical Society. When I say "pillars" of an organization, I think of the fluted marble pillars holding up the lintels which remain of the Parthe-

non. In my mind, they have been like this- and I almost picture them that way, in marble!



They joined our Society in 2004 and dove right in, addressing and pursuing all of those needs of a Historical Society listed above- it was a small Society then. I believe they were members #16 & 17!

Larry began the vast job of reorganizing and cataloging the thousands of artifacts in the museum, then located in the upper level of the Old Courthouse building, while Jackie took over the Society finances, which were in disarray, and laid the groundwork for recruiting members and fundraising. Their efforts brought about tremendous accomplishments! Please read Pam LaFountain's excellent piece, "Tribute to Larry and Jackie Cote" on page 3 of this issue. As Pam notes, the outwardly visible works by this dedicated and energetic couple are only the "tip of the iceberg" of their commitment of time and thought to our society.

To give some measure of what they have meant to our town and in this case even nationally, one need only consider the campaign for restoration of the Pier Railroad Bridge. A federal grant had been offered in 1999 which required that the town raise 10%, that is \$100,000, by the deadline of 2007.

When the Cotes arrived on the scene in 2004, nothing had been raised toward that goal, with only 18 members in the Society and less than three years to go. Jackie took this project on, coordinating all of it - meetings with state and federal representatives, handling the paperwork, and raising funds in every way imaginable, ranging from selling \$5 items in bank lobbies to writing applications for additional grants. When the deadline arrived, in 2007, she had led the efforts which raised \$144,000, which allowed the project to go forward. It is not an exaggeration to say that without her, the Pier Bridge would probably now be irreparably sagging toward the waters of the Sugar River! *(Continued on Page 2)*

### NHS Times

#### **Business Meetings:**

#### **Open to the Public**

(Note new meeting times)

May 13, 6:30 PM

June 10, 6:30 PM

July 8, 6:30 PM

August 12, 6:30 PM

#### **Museum Open Hours**

10AM-2PM Sundays

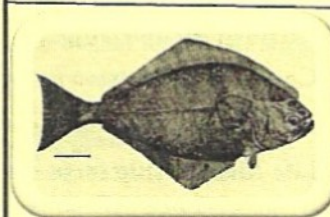
#### Programs

See page 2

#### **CONTACT WITH A FORMER NEWPORTER, BRAD SCHMITZ, NOW LIVING IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA.**

Brad worked with our Historical Society in May 2006, with Mary Lou McGuire, Peter Lovely and Rick Charter, to organize a dinner held at the Newport Opera House, to honor local veterans. He now is doing summer tours in Homer, Alaska, the "Halibut Fishing Capital of the World" as part of the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.

For more information, you can contact him at [alaskaenglish1@gmail.com](mailto:alaskaenglish1@gmail.com), or 907-310-5939. We have a copy of an article on this project from the Homer News, March 21, 2024, at the NHS Museum, if you would like to read more, and maybe go fishing for Halibut in ALASKA!



**NHS Board:** Arthur Walsh - Pres., Pam LaFountain-Sec., Pris Hagebusch- Newsletter Editor, April Anderson, Arnie Hebert, Laura McCrillis Kessler, Donna Menard, Dean Stetson, Stan Sweeney.

**NEWPORT NH CHRONICLES**  
 at Summercrest Assisted Living,  
 By Dean Stetson  
 Thursday, May 23, 2024 - 2:00 PM

**The Needs of the Historical Society -**  
**A Time of Trial and Setback for the Cote Family**  
 (continued from page 1)

Summercrest welcomes you to a free presentation focused on Our "Sunshine" Town, Newport New Hampshire, by The Newport Historical Society titled: "When The News was on Paper"

Newport is well known for its "Argus Champion," a small-town newspaper with a rich legacy for independent journalism and editorial. The "Argus" chronicled the areas news and happenings in a weekly newsprint edition, between July 23, 1925 and February 3, 1955. But the paper – and its influence has been around much longer.

Do you remember waiting for the paper to be delivered? The weekly newspaper was the source of information for both local and national news but more importantly, information of relevance and importance to Newport and its citizens. News of The War and conditions over-seas was available by radio and other newspapers, but the Argus was where you could find out the price of potatoes at Woodhull's Market or who came to visit Minnie Davis last Sunday. Where else could you find photos of a family member on a school sports team or read about them in a community play?

Newport's Argus Champion continues to evolve to meet today's interest in the local printed word but few know of Newport's newspaper heritage and the deep political origins and influence of its predecessor; "The Whip and Spur" – a motivating name in itself!

Please join us at Summercrest to spend an engaging 90 minutes, learning more about the History of Newport's printed "Town Crier" that most of us know as The Argus Champion. Space is limited and reservations are required. Contact Diane Way at 603-863-8181 to sign up. Executive Chef Korey will prepare light snacks and refreshments for this very special event.

Sadly, the amazing productivity of this remarkable couple on behalf of the Newport Historical Society and the people of our town came to an abrupt reduction and eventual halt in July, 2023. Jackie, long in need of knee replacement, finally went for that surgery. In the first few postoperative days all seemed on track for a normal recovery, with Jackie at home again.

Unfortunately, severe nausea set in, which remained uncontrolled even after a 10 day stay in hospital. Her unexpected and relentless gastrointestinal distress, preventing her from taking good nourishment continued and in August a CT scan revealed gallbladder issues. Surgery was performed, which ordinarily would bring prompt relief, but in the operating room a hole in the small intestine was found, and she remained in the hospital from August 18 through October 4.

Still unable to take sufficient nourishment by mouth, a feeding tube had been placed and she was sent to a rehabilitation center from August 4 until January 9, three long months on a feeding tube before she could finally return home.

In the interim, dedicated Larry had been tirelessly caring for Jackie and spent most days, entire days, at her bedside in the hospital and rehabilitation center. He carried on well for months as the museum director, but finally had to discontinue his duties for the Society as well.

Jackie has been steadily improving while convalescing at home – she is now eating ("too well" she remarks!), and has been up and about with a walker. At this point she can even walk 20 feet without it, and is steadily able to be less dependent on it. She and Larry have been taking drives around the town almost daily.

It is wonderful to see the color back in Jackie's cheeks and her memory good enough to correct Larry at times while I was speaking with them a few days ago! It was delightful to hear them say that perhaps they will be able to be docents again, as the weather becomes nicer- that will be a joyful thing for all of us!

**Newport Historical Society Membership Form:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address/City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Membership Type: \_\_\_ Individual (\$15) \_\_\_ Family (\$25) \_\_\_ Junior (\$1)

Corporate/Business: \_\_\_ Bronze(\$25) \_\_\_ Silver (\$50) \_\_\_ Gold (\$75) \_\_\_ Platinum(\$100) \_\_\_ Diamond(\$100+)

Here's my additional donation to the: Museum \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Operating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Building Updates \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Life Membership (\$250 - each person) \_\_\_\_\_ (Never have to renew again!)

Payment Method: \_\_\_ Cash \_\_\_ Check (Newport Historical Society) Total Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to: **Newport Historical Society, PO Box 413, Newport, NH 03773**

(NHS membership year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30 each year) *but we'll take your membership \$ anytime!*

## TRIBUTE TO LARRY AND JACKIE COTE, by Pam LaFountain

*"On the day when man told the story of his life to man, history was born."* Alfred de Vigny

In an Annual Report for the Town of Newport in 2014, they were referred to as "Mr. and Mrs. Museum" and "Mr. and Mrs. Farmers' Market," but most likely you hear them in connection with this comment, "Got a question about Newport history, just ask Larry or Jackie." To quote a popular commercial, "Larry and Jackie Cote's contribution to the Newport Historical Society has been priceless!"

As I began to read over the Mill Town Messengers, the Newport Historical Society's newsletters from 2007 to the present, I started to think that looking at the contributions of the Cotes was like looking at an iceberg, 10% is visible to all who pass by, while 90% is invisible, but so valuable. So here is my attempt to show the 10%, so that you can only imagine that 90% we will never know.

I am told that Larry and Jackie's interest in Newport history most likely goes back to their early life living in the Oak Street area of Newport, but really came to fruition when Newport was awarded a \$400,000 transportation enhancement grant from the NH Dept. of Transportation to be used for fire protection and other repairs to the Pier Railroad Covered Bridge, and then the Wright Railroad Covered Bridge, if Newport could raise another \$100,000 for the project. This challenge propelled Jackie "full steam ahead" to meet that goal, and she, with Larry by her side, has not turned around and looked back since!



Jackie has been the Treasurer of the Newport Historical Society since at least 2007, while Larry has been a member of the Museum Committee, a member of the Board of Directors, and Museum Curator.

It was Larry, who in 2011 announced that the NHS would be moving into a new museum in the Nettleton House on Central Street, leaving their former location on the second floor of the Old Courthouse. Jackie was a valuable member of the Website Development Committee, which was responsible for developing guidelines and determining the content of the new site. The Cotes were also members of the Corbin Covered Bridge Festival and Newport's 250th Anniversary Celebration Committees.

Both Larry and Jackie have contributed much to the major publication of the Newport Historical Society, a quarterly newsletter called the "Mill Town Messenger". Both have written articles on a range of topics. Jackie's articles have included "Newport Mansions: The Gables, and Richards' Library," "North Newport: A Local Hub of Industry," "The History of the Corbin Covered Bridge," and "Newport - Killingworth CT Connection"

Larry's articles are many. Two popular topics for his articles

are: *Newport Notables*, which covers famous Newporters from Dr. James Corbin, a Revolutionary War surgeon, to local artist Barbara Huff, (whose paintings feature historic buildings in town. He also has written many articles on local buildings and businesses like "The Lewis Block," and "Pharmacies of Newport."

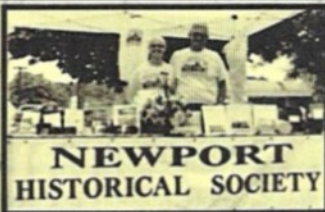
In addition to these articles, both the Cotes write regular columns "The Treasurer's Report" and "The Museum Report." In Jackie's treasurer's report she focuses on annual membership drives and through her efforts, membership in 2017 reached 275, an accomplishment she worked hard to reach. She also promotes items in the Museum Gift Shop, like hand-painted Christmas ornaments, local author publications, and gifts like pottery crocks, notecards, sun-catchers, t-shirts, and postcards. Through these newsletters, members of the Society who live outside the region can still purchase local items, with Jackie filling the orders herself. Also, during Membership Drives, she explains how dues are spent each year.

Larry's Museum Reports give numbers of visitors to the museum in the past month, explains artifacts and documents that have been received through donations, solicits members for answers to historical questions, list items the museum is looking for, and provides volunteer opportunities for members. He also encourages members to share their history with the Historical Society. Discussing repairs and renovations in the museum, and explaining new features at the museum like heat, air-conditioning and the installation of a security system are also part of his monthly Museum Report.

Both Jackie and Larry have publications in the Historical Museum Gift Shop; Jackie's "The 19 Covered Bridges of Newport NH" and Larry's "Mansions and Prominent Landmarks of Newport" which he co-authored with Mary Lou McGuire and Ray Reid, are still available for sale. In addition, many of the other publications have either Larry or Jackie or both as contributors.

Outside the museum, Jackie and Larry could be seen promoting the Museum and The Society around the area. Prior to the Covid Pandemic, passing by booths at the Sugar River Bank in the winter months, and the Farmers' Market during the summer, and other town events like the Apple Pie Craft Fair, Richards' School PTO nights, "Twas the Night Before Christmas" and Chamber Day on the Common, you could usually be sure that Jackie and Larry were manning the NHS booth at sometime during the event. And Larry always enjoyed attending the Sullivan County Farm Day in Unity, explaining old farm implements to young area students.

Larry has also been an important presenter for the Historical Societies Program Series, with presentations on Historic Postcards, (Larry's passion), and "Cemeteries of Newport" with a team of local cemetery historians for NH Old Graveyard Association (also presented for NHS). He presented WCNL Newport Minutes for which he won 2nd prize in the NH Association of Broadcasters Golden Mike Competition and "A Walk Through Newport's Past" program, which focused on reading old photos to better understand local town history.



## Jackie and Larry Cote: Taking Care of the Newport Historical Society since 2004!

(Continued from page 3) Jackie made sure that the Historical Society had representative items for sale at the Library Arts Center's Gallery of Gifts during the Christmas season. During the 2011, 250th Anniversary Celebration, Larry and Jackie assisted Maura and Dean Stetson in finding historical photos for the *Discovery Challenge Photo Contest*.

The Cotes' role in representing the Newport Historical Society often took them outside the Newport area. In 2017, Larry, Jackie, and Laura McCrillis visited Killingworth, CT on that town's 350th anniversary. (the first settlers to Newport were from this location!) The trio rode a Rolls Royce in the Anniversary Parade and visited Parmelee Farm, Killingworth's Historical Society Museum.

The Cotes also traveled to Belfast, Maine to receive the donation of an Austin Corbin II family bible from Ellen (Edgell) Simmons. And it was not beyond them to make miscellaneous trips to pick up publications, gifts, or whatever anyone else was willing to give to the NHS museum. It was not uncommon to see a Newport Historical Society team of walkers at the "Stepping Up to End Violence" walk-a-thon sponsored by Claremont's "Turning Points" with Larry and Jackie in the crowd.

Back at the museum, Larry and Jackie regularly served as docents on Sundays, welcoming guests and helping visitors conduct research; or giving up time for a class reunion, school group or just a few curious individuals who requested a special visit outside the Sunday time frame.

Inspired by a presentation Jackie saw on *Preserving Oral History* by Jo Radner, she encouraged the Society to purchase the equipment needed to record Oral Histories at the museum and began promoting the program in the monthly newsletter.

Behind the scenes, Jackie and Larry contributed to the Newport Historical Society in more ways than one can count;

1. Attending town meetings which involved historical issues or buildings in town,
2. Serving on the Heritage Committee,
3. Changing displays at the museum, organizing donations of documents, photos or artifacts into binders,
4. Copying articles or documents for citizens, keeping abreast of care of historic documents,
5. Helping with genealogy requests,
6. Answering countless emails,
7. Stocking the museum gift shop,
8. Building shelves for displaying local publications

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The Newport Historical Society  
P.O. Box 413, Newport, NH 03773,  
Museum phone 603-863-1294  
Website [www.newportnhhistory.org](http://www.newportnhhistory.org)  
Email [newporths1761@gmail.com](mailto:newporths1761@gmail.com)

9. Keeping the museum clean.

This was never so true as when the museum moved from the Old Courthouse Annex to the Nettleton House. Larry and Jackie developed a plan to reorganize items in the NHS Annex using rolling carts with metal framed shelves, and acid-free boxes to house all the donations from Newport citizens.

The Cotes have received some recognition for their priceless contributions to the preservation of Newport's history. Jackie won a Chamber of Commerce **Busy Bee Award** and a **Distinguished Service Award** for spearheading a campaign to raise \$143,000 to save the Pier Bridge (2008). In 2014, the Annual Town Report was dedicated to Larry and Jackie. The dedication can be read by going to [https://scholars.unh.edu/newport\\_nh\\_reports/61/](https://scholars.unh.edu/newport_nh_reports/61/) and click on Town of Newport 2014 Annual Report - pgs. 1-4. Then on February 2, 2017, the Cotes were honored as the **Newport Citizens of the Year** for their continued support and enthusiasm for passing on the history of Newport to future generations through the Newport Historical Society.

But, after all of this, remember that iceberg I mentioned at the beginning of this article! No wonder when someone asks a historical question about the little New Hampshire town of Newport, the response is usually "Got a question about Newport history, just ask Larry or Jackie."

Source: *Mill Town Messengers and the 2014 & 2016 Newport NH Annual Town Report*

### NOW WHAT?

How can the current members of the Newport Historical Society and the town of Newport carry on the wonderful legacy of this dedicated couple? The Covid pandemic years saw a decline in participation in the activities of the Society (as happened to organizations all over the world!) When it came time to begin rebuilding, the Cote's personal situation was changing. The number of volunteers was down, donations were down, and the vibrant energy of the Cote's was not as available to sustain the group. Not their fault!

It is time to rebuild a membership dedicated to continuing the work the Cotes put into this group. Time to rebuild the financial resources necessary to keep a public organization going in today's digital age. Organizations like this one are expected to run differently if they are to be successful today. We have begun to identify ways to go forward and better provide Newport's History for our residents, past and present. There are places available on the Executive board, and in various activities. Record-keeping via software, like Past Perfect, takes time, hands and energy, as well as updated equipment. Reaching out to former Newporters who have moved away takes participating in the modern methodologies of information sharing. The current Board welcomes your ideas and participation. Please help us continue this valuable work. Call, email, write (see box to the left) or show up on a Sunday at the Museum (10-2) or a monthly meeting, (see page 1) to share your ideas and to assist us in this work.