

# MILL TOWN MESSENGER

THIS NEWSLETTER GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY JEFF MILLER, EDITOR OF WWW.LAKESUNAPEECHAMPION.COM

Volume 3, Issue 3 August 2009

## SOUTH END KIDDIES' CIRCUS



Anita Kangas, Bill Kennedy,  
Dot Conrey Collins

Summertime in Newport used to mean the circus was coming to town! Children looked forward to the yearly rounds of the Walter L. Main Circus. But thanks to Mae Gobin, the children of South Main Street had the opportunity to perform in their own circus from 1930/1931 to 1936. According to Jinny Parker "It was the Depression - we had to make our own entertainment." And these children did! A noon-time circus parade down Main Street advertised the matinee and evening performances. In 1931 the parade was led by Albert Leavitt dressed as a clown and riding a bicycle, followed by Ringmaster Barton Cummings leading his pony Buster. Dancing girls, floats showcasing the circus menagerie (roosters, chickens, white rats, cats, dogs, rabbits, and turtles,) Tuffy Bartlett as the Fat Man, and circus performers followed.

Performances at 2:00 and 8:00 were first held in the barn at 186 South Main, but as the circus grew it moved first to Bartlett's barn and Fellows Field on Elm Street, and then to the Town Hall/Opera House. In 1931, the first year of reported earnings, the take was \$4.50. When divided among the twenty performers, each child walked away with \$.22 for their efforts. Proceeds grew to over \$100 and, by 1936, seventy-five children participated.

(continued page 3)



Howard Bartlett

## NEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

Streets, Roadways and  
Byways of  
Newport, New Hampshire



The Newport Historical Society has recently published a second book in anticipation of Newport's upcoming 250th anniversary in 2011. *Streets, Roadways and Byways of Newport, New Hampshire* provides an historic tour of Newport featuring the areas surrounding Main Street, thoroughfares such as Maple and Sunapee Streets, the outlying villages of Guild, Kelleyville, and North Newport, and Depot Square. This book is packed with interesting information that is not

readily accessible, and based on the knowledge and memories of NHS members. It contains intriguing views and interesting commentary about Newport's past. Be sure to pick up a copy today!

Books are available at the NHS Museum over the Old Courthouse Restaurant, the Thrift Shoppe, Dorr Woolen Store in Guild, Hubert's, Harrington's Jewelers, or by calling 863-3105. It is affordably priced at \$15.00.

Please join us!  
**NHS Monthly**

Meetings

Open To All  
Second Monday of  
the Month

Sugar River Bank  
Community Room

August 10

September 14

October 12

November 9

7:00 pm

2009 Schedule for  
**NHS Museum**

Hours: 10:00-2:00

Friday & Saturday

June 5 - October 16

Above the Old Court-  
house Restaurant at  
30 Main Street

**The Inside Scoop**

- *Children's Games*
- *Pine Street West Personalities*
- *NHS Thank You*
- *Newport Notables: Mary J. Hawes Wilmarth*

## CHILDREN'S GAMES OF OLD NEWPORT

Museum curator Larry Cote recently discovered a list of twenty-three games interfiled with a sheaf of very old school papers. We would like to document the rules or instructions for playing these games in order to save them for future generations. If you recognize any game on this list, we would appreciate it if you would write down the rules of play and bring or mail it to the Museum. Larry Cote (863-3105) will also arrange for assistance to help you record your information. The Museum is open Friday and Saturday from 10

A.M. until 2 P.M. until October 16. Our mailing address is: Newport Historical Society, P.O. Box 413, Newport, NH 03773.

1. Come-se-come
2. Hide the thimble
3. Hot coffee
4. Drop the handkerchief
5. Copenhagen
6. Roll the platter
7. Who-sir? Me-sir?
8. Needles-eye
9. What will you give a poor old soldier?

10. Going to Jerusalem
11. What will you send to China?
12. Vegetables
13. Conundrums
14. Earth, Air, or Water
15. Consequences
16. Post-office
17. Button-button
18. Stage-Coach
19. Donkey
20. Jacob and Ruth
21. Boston
22. Blind-man's bluff
23. Still pond, no fair morning

## PINE WEST PERSONALITIES: MARY WILCOX 1768

The NHS, with permission from the Board of Selectmen, is actively working to preserve the Pine Street West Cemetery. A renewed understanding of the importance and value of Newport's cemeteries became evident in 2008 when we sponsored the NH Old Graveyard Association's (NHOGA) fall meeting. Pine Street West contains the earliest recorded history of Newport, examples of the earliest artwork in town, and genealogical information that is not recorded anywhere else. While preparing the NHOGA program on Newport's cemeteries, a careful study of Andy Andrews' valuable 1995 documentation showed that several stones were missing. The NHS immediately formed a committee to investigate how to best preserve our oldest cemetery. An assessment was conducted to record pertinent information such as the size, location, ownership, number of stones, and a detailed description of the present conditions. The work at Pine West presently centers on integrating the

1995 information with a photograph of each stone. Further plans include raising money to fix broken and fallen headstones, with the final goal of restoring Pine Street West Cemetery in time for Newport's 250th celebration in 2011.

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The one half acre of land for Pine Street West cemetery was deeded to the town on December 31, 1771 by original settler Benjamin Bragg and his wife Eleanor. It is said to have been used as a burial ground previous to that, and the earliest grave is dated 1768.

Mary Wilcox, the first of eleven children born to Major Jesse and Thankful Stevens Wilcox, has the distinction of being the first person to be born, and die, in Newport. She lived just eleven days, from February 26, 1768 until March 9, 1768. Mary's headstone sits in the middle of this cemetery, surrounded by her family and neighbors. Her father Jesse was one of the original Killingworth settlers, occupying land about

one quarter of a mile south of the Pine West Cemetery. He was the town clerk in 1770 and 1771 as well as a selectman for 7 years.



Effigy on the headstone of Mary Wilcox

In Memory of Mary  
Daughter of Maj' Jeffe &  
Thankful Willcox Who  
died March 9<sup>th</sup> 1768  
aged 11 days The first  
birth & death in this Town

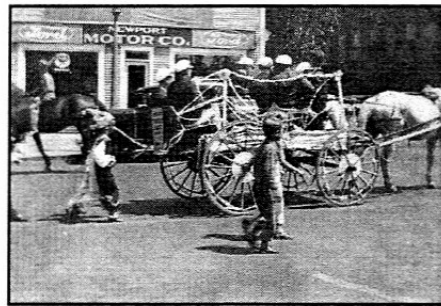
My Babe Sleeps here in duft  
Till Christ fhall come to Raife the

Inscription

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY THANK YOU: DALE FLEWELLING

The NHS gives a special thank you to Dale Flewelling of Art Attack Signs & Designs (33 Spring St., Newport, NH 863-6911) for providing the two magnificent signs that announced our opening. You may have seen one on the Common near the Information Booth; look for the second one on Main Street when the Museum is open. Thank you Dale for your interest and support of the Newport Historical Society!

**SOUTH MAIN STREET KIDDIES' CIRCUS 1930/31 - 1936**



The South End Kiddies' Circus was one of the most popular summer events in Newport for about six years. The first performers were only from the south end of town because, according to circus performers Jinny Parker and Dottie Collins, back then children from different parts of town (north of the Main Street bridge, south of the bridge, and Sunapee Street) kept to their own territory. Over time this event grew to unite the children of Newport for at least July and August, and by the end of its run the South End Kiddies' Circus became the Kiddies' Circus, and included performers from Croydon, Claremont, and Sutton. According to Jinny Parker some of the performers were less than enthusiastic at first, but overcame their fears and whole-heartedly joined the fun on the day of the performance. Mrs. Gobin contacted the parents to see what talents their children could contribute, and after being signed up the performers spent the rest of the summer practicing their acts on their own. The first time they came together was on the big day. Parents and children designed the costumes, which were quite elaborate.



**Front Row:** \_\_\_ Guillow, Dot Conrey, \_\_\_ Guillow, Robert Demison **Back Row:** Junior Rollins, June Sinclair, Arlene Gobin, Frances Kennedy, Marjorie Rollins

The first *Argus-Champion* report of the circus included Jinny Parker and Arlene and "Pinkie" (Ida) Gobin as the "Dancing Girls," magic stunts by Albert Leavitt and Robert Hennessey, juggling by Francis Hennessey and Ronald Parker, the "Camel Walk" by the Bartlett Brothers, and clowns Bobby Hurd, Clinton Bartlett, Tuffy Bartlett, and Maurice Wright. "When Your Hair Has turned to Silver" and "Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet" were sung by Virginia Parker and Arlene Gobin. A wild west show by Robert Hennessey, Milton Reed, Ronald Parker, and Buster the pony ended the first reported South End Kiddies' Circus.



Minnie Mouse costume worn by Dottie Collins in 1934.

Acts added through the years included Amos and Andy, trapeze and acrobatics, boxing matches, and a circus band led by Robert Hurd. The band included Arthur Brault, Warren Winter, Calvin Beldin, Bobby Gobin and Donald Brault. In 1933 there was a midway with freak shows: Betty Rollins appeared as the half man-half woman, Elizabeth Upham as the bearded lady, and Martha Emery was the snake charmer. In 1934 Dottie Conrey Collins dressed as Minnie Mouse and sang *What! No Mickey Mouse? What Kind of a Party is This?* and Mr. C. A. Wright of Sutton brought his trained dog act and, conveniently, his circus tent. For the first time Miss Avis Jones and Ali Baba the elephant (a wooden frame draped in gray flannel)

made their appearance, along with the Hill Billy Boys from Croydon (Jimmy Riley and the Howard Brothers.) Tuffy Bartlett was Mae West. By 1936 the circus included the Billings Sisters of Claremont who demonstrated their skill on roller skates, and Louise Crone, billed as the Shirley Temple of Newport, who sang and danced at the Opera House.

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*Many thanks to Dottie Collins and Jinny Parker for sharing their memories of the South End Kiddies' Circus.*

**KIDDIES' CIRCUS SCORES DECIDED HIT**

The sixth annual Kiddies' Circus, presented in the Town Hall Wednesday afternoon and evening, Sept. 2, was a decided success. Seventy-five children, representative of Newport's talented youth, delighted the crowds with a splendid performance, an honest-to-goodness circus from beginning to end.

Everything that can be found under the big top of the greatest circus, from acrobats and clowns to elephants and cowboys, was included in the program. The Strong Man, the Clown Band, the Trapeze Performers, the Acrobats, the Magicians, and Uncle Ezra's Cowboys, straight from the wild and woolly west—all were portrayed by the children in true circus style, and drew from the audience no small amount of applause. The corps of clowns, hilariously funny, chief among whom were Junior Peters as the "constable" and Bob Corliss as "Rube," kept the crowds in gales of laughter, while the dancing girls and other performers evoked their admiration and applause.

Among the special attractions featured on the program were: The Billings sisters of Claremont, in a remarkable exhibition of skill and grace on roller skates; Mickey and Minnie Mouse; the Applesauce Cadets; dancing and singing by the Paulette children of Claremont; acrobatics by our own little "Pinkie" Gobin; "Peanuts," the famous elephant, and "Katharine," the Arkansas giraffe, put through their paces by Miss Avis Jones; tap dancing and singing by lovely little Louise Crone, the Shirley Temple of Newport; Gracie Baker in her "Mummy" song; and Marjorie Rollins in her sleek-wire performance.

## Newport Historical Society Membership Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

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 Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_    Operating Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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### South End Kiddies' Circus, 1934

Do you know any of the children in this picture? Please call the Newport Historical Society (863-1294) or Larry Cote (863-3105) if you can help us identify them. Thank you!

Front Row: 1. Dottie Conrey  
              2. Louise Crone  
              3. Betty Rollins

Back Row: 1.  
              2.  
              3.  
              4. Jane Silsby

### NEWPORT NOTABLES: MARY J. HAWES WILMARTH



**Sources:** Wheeler's *History of Newport*; Currey, Joseph: *Chicago*; Waterman, Arba: *Historical Review of Chicago*; Springfield, IL *Republican*, May 7, 1907; Schultz, Rima Lunin: *Hull-House Maps and Papers*.

This post card shows Mrs. Henry M. Wilmarth (center) riding with political activist Jane Addams in a 1912 women's suffrage parade in Chicago. She was 75 years of age. Born Mary J. Hawes in New Bedford, MA, she moved to Newport with her retired sea-captain father between 1840 and 1848. Upon her marriage to Henry M. Wilmarth of Newport in 1861, she moved with him to Chicago, IL where he became a leading businessman. Mrs. Wilmarth was left a wealthy widow at 48 and the remainder of her life was devoted to the support of worthy causes. She became a leading activist of the Chicago Women's Club and an early and enthusiastic supporter of Hull House, which she supported by personally subsidizing residents and supplying funds to keep the settlement running. In 1893 she served as chairman of the Woman's World's Congress Committee on Education at the Columbian Exposition. Mrs. Wilmarth was a contributing founder of the National Women's Suffrage Association which was established to continue the work of Susan B. Anthony after her death in 1907.