


MILL TOWN MESSENGER

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July, 2016

From the President's Pen ...  by Cathryn Baird

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” ~Winston Churchill

June 21, 2016 marked the passing of John Cooper McCrillis, a dedicated member of the Newport Historical Society. He was a true patriot not only as delineated by military service but also his allegiance to his hometown of Newport, NH. Through many years of quiet and humble service, John helped to bring positive changes to the preservation of community history and heritage. John was a strong supporter of the creation of the Newport Historical Society Museum, the publication of the 250th book “Celebrating Community” and most recently, the museum window replacement project.



The Newport Historical Society is proud to honor and remember John McCrillis. He gave generously to achieve a greater good for “The Sunshine Town” through his selfless efforts to “make a life by what we give.” If each of us can emulate even a small measure of John’s kindness and gentle manner, the sun will keep shining in Newport.

Meeting & Program Times

All members and the public are invited to all meetings and programs.

BUSINESS MEETINGS:

NHS museum, 6:30-8 PM

Mon., Aug. 8

Mon. Sep. 12

Mon. Oct. 10

PROGRAMS:

6:30 to 8 PM

Tue. Aug 9, Billy B. Van,
Library Arts Center

Thu. Sep. 15, New Hampshire’s
Grange Movement, Its Rise,
Triumphs and Decline. By
Steve Taylor, in the Richards
Library Ballroom.

Tue. Oct 11, Tales from the Em-
erson Diary and other Newport
49ers. By Jayna Hooper, in the
Richards Library Ballroom.

**NHS AUGUST 9 PROGRAM FEATURES
THE LIFE OF BILLY B. VAN, by Cathryn Baird**

Billy B. Van is credited with coining Newport’s nickname, *The Sunshine Town.* He owned a Guernsey dairy farm on Spring Street, which later became the production site of his Pine Tree Products business. Van bought an old book for 10 cents, called, *Chemistry at a Glance,* and then experimented mixing products to make his Pine Tree Soap. Van was also a nationally-known motivational speaker. Before he was involved in any of these undertakings, however, he was a well-known vaudevillian and Broadway actor.



BILLY B. VAN
Newport’s Goodwill Ambassador from New England

He lived in Georges Mills in the early 1900s and nicknamed the village “Van Harbor.” His best friend was Lee Collins, who went on to become a choreographer for

the Ziegfeld Follies. Later, Collins took over his father’s clock museum in Georges Mills. As an actor, Van coined the work “Skidoo” related to “skedaddle” and “23 skidoo” meaning “get out of here.” The following alphabet acrostic highlights some of Van’s activities:

- Actor, Author
- Burlesque, Business
- Comedian, Casino owner
- Dancer, “Dick Dead Eye”
- Equity Motion Pictures Founder (became MGM)
- Fellows Gear Shaper WWII worker
- Guernsey cows
- Honorary Mayor, Humorist
- Inventor, Inexhaustible
- Justice of the Peace
- Kentucky Butter Churn patent holder
- Lucky HooDoo
- Minstrel, Milkman
- Newport’s Nickname
- Opportunistic
- Pine Tree Products
- Quick Wit
- Radio fan and Advertiser
- Skidoo, Silent film actor/producer
- Tuberculosis Survivor
- Unofficial mayor of Newport
- Vaudeville, Van Harbor
- Writer, Will Rogers friend, Wrigley’s gum commercial
- X-traordinary!!
- Yankee Goodwill Ambassador
- Zulu Warrior silent film

NEWPORT NOTABLE by Cathryn Baird

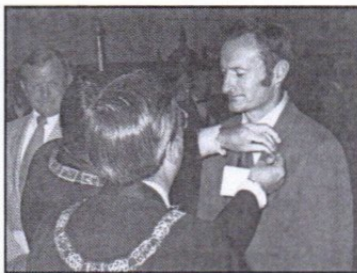
John Cooper McCrillis

May 30, 1930 - June 21, 2016

John Cooper McCrillis was born in Newport NH, the son of John Wilmarth McCrillis and Hester Laura Cooper and a descendant of John Wilmarth, who settled in Newport in the late 1700's. John was a lifelong resident of "The Sunshine Town". He attended Newport schools, graduated from Kimball Union Academy in 1948 and Dartmouth College in 1952. Following his graduation from Dartmouth College, he served in the United States Army during the Korean War era with a tour in Germany. After his discharge from the Army, John worked for the Old Colony Trust Company of Boston, MA, during which time he met the love of his life, Katharine Cooper Wood of Bedford, NY. They were married June 27, 1959 on the island of Maui, Hawaii. In 1963 he moved back to his hometown of Newport, where he joined the family insurance agency, McCrillis and Eldredge (Est. 1890), as a principal and owner, until his retirement in 1992. In 1991, John was honored as the Newport Area Chamber of Commerce's Citizen of The Year, as he was recognized for his lifetime of service to Newport, representing the best in purpose, competence and reliability.

John was a Founding Partner of Hospital Hill and Summercrest Assisted Living Facility and a Founding Partner of the Newport Tennis Club. As a founder of the Newport Nordic Club he was instrumental in having the 30 meter Olympic ski jump moved from Lake Placid, NY, to Newport. He supported the local community through his participation on many boards and involvement with numerous charitable and service organizations. He truly was a dedicated, active citizen who quietly served others with humility and grace. It is with great respect for John and his contributions to Newport

From the Newport Historical Society Archives



John at a Mason Ceremony



SOPHOMORE CLASS
 First row: Wilbur Willis, Edward Steloveitz, James Collins, Roger Leber, Durham Hughes, Charles Andrews. Second row: Joyce Downing, Sheila Southwell, Joan Davis, John McCrillis, Clarence Kelly, Jane Perkins, Barbara Kinn, Jane Conway, Margaret Wages, Phyllis Harvey. Third row: Janet Pratt, Mildred Johnson, Ma Hansen, Mary Osborne, Alberta LaFontaine, Thomas Marotta, Beverly Ordway, Irene Pease, Barbara Butler, Patricia Putnam. Fourth row: Kenneth Kendall, Elba Baid, Thomas Sharps, Wilfred Chartrand, Donald Bennett, Paul St. Cyr, Conrad Starr, Robert Leaver.



SKI TEAM
 First row: John Hutchinson, Edward Landon. Second row: Erro Niemi, Neil Hastings, John McCrillis, Kenneth Kendall, Richard Niemi, Capt. Duk Roy, missing.

1946 Yearbook photos



THE MUSEUM REPORT

By Larry Cote

October 6th is the anniversary of the signing of the Newport town charter in 1761. It is our practice to create all new displays for the town's "birthday", October 6th. You have about five to six weeks to see the current displays before the change begins.

In June, we began our program season. We hope you find these programs interesting and informative. They are held on the second Tuesday of the month, as seen on the front page of this newsletter. Mark your calendars and watch for posters and community calendar listings for location and subject matter.

You will soon be able to access bound Argus-Champion newspaper at the museum! When the **Eagle-Times** recently moved to their new location, they donated all of their back issues to the Claremont Historical Society. Being a good steward of local history, they are donating the **Argus-Champion** issues to the Newport Historical Society Museum. We are informed that they have a vast archive of old photographs, from which the Newport subjects will also be donated to our Museum. Many thanks to Wayne McCutcheon and the Claremont Historical Society.

Donations of Newport artifacts are also arriving and are gratefully accepted. It takes a large inventory of Newport artifacts to allow the Museum Committee to change the displays yearly and keep them fresh and interesting.

Summer months frequently bring visiting class reunion participants to the museum.. We are always delighted to be included in their agenda. This provides a group of past residents' the opportunity to see and hear about Newport's history with a private tour. If you are planning a reunion, please consider a visit to the Newport Historical Society Museum at 20 Central Street. We will make it interesting for your group.

Speaking of reunions, it is sad to think that after 91 years of educating Newport's youth, "Towle" has had its last classes and is now closed. From the first class in 1925 to the last in 2016, Towle School has served the town well. Memories of the "Towle Tigers" roaring onto the field or court are now only preserved in graduate's memories, and in the Historical Society archives. What lies ahead for this grand, old, proud building is uncertain.

The Museum is open on Sundays, except for holiday weekends, from 10 A.M. until 2 P.M. year round or by appointment. For an appointment, call 863-1294, leave a message and we'll get back to you.

FROM THE TREASURER'S DESK

By Jackie Cote

Newport Historical Society has a **new book**, thanks to the many talents of our own, **Jayna Huot Hooper!** Jayna was the author of our magnificent 2011 history book, *Celebrating Community, Newport New Hampshire, 1761-2011, 250 Years and Beyond*. The new book is titled – **Billy B Van – Newport's Sunshine Peddler**. I was privileged to be one of the proof-readers of the book. I can truly say that I learned a lot about this man, his many accomplishments and business endeavors. We have solicited and obtained contributions so that the book can be **printed in color**. It will be available for purchase beginning at our August 9, Billy B Van program for \$20.00.

Beginning in September, we will launch our annual membership drive. Our members are the life blood of our Society. Your dues and additional contributions make possible the programs that we host, purchases of Newport artifacts that occasionally "pop-up" on ebay, preservation materials and the many operating expenses of the Society. Without your support, we could not do all that we do. So, when you receive your membership drive letter in September, we sincerely hope that you will renew your membership. Some of you have already renewed for the coming year (October 2016-September 2017) and beyond and will receive a separate letter noting the term of your membership. Thank you for your past, present and future support!

International Work Camp helps Newport once again by painting the Newport Historical Society Museum's steps.

International Work Campers from Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria & China, spent July 25th volunteering to scrape & paint the handicap entrance and steps to the museum. A job well done on a very hot day! Thank you Adam, Michal, Katari-na, Sarah & Qi.



**BILLY B. VAN,
NEWPORT'S SUNSHINE PEDDLER**
Forthcoming book by Jayna Hooper

"Forget whatever petty, personal feelings you may have and let us get together and DO SOMETHING, BE SOMETHING; and above all, don't be a pessimist!" So wrote Billy B. Van to the citizens of Georges Mills in 1913. The natives weren't too keen on Billy's idea of changing the name of their post office to Van Harbor. "Now, I desire cooperation of every man, woman and child in the vicinity who might be interested in the advancement of mankind."

Billy B. Van was serious. Vainglorious, (maybe just a little?) but serious. From the 1890s through the 1920s, when vaudeville was America's form of mass entertainment, Billy was one of its leading and highest paid stars. And much like today's major Hollywood stars, Billy earnestly ascribed to the most progressive of society's causes and ideas. In the pre-World War I years, those ideas included a brash confidence in a rapid, commercially expanding U.S., guided by scientific principles. "We need an electric light plant," Billy's plea to the people of Georges Mills continued, "better sidewalks, good roads, a modern, sanitary school house, better fire department equipment, a first class hotel, and above all a class of people who will build homes and furnish employment for

the natives."

Well, even though Van left behind bucolic Georges Mills in 1920, it was these ideals that propelled him for the remainder of his life. This was evident in his enthusiasm for developing cutting edge dairy practices and inventions; his pursuit for a hygiene product made only of the best ingredients; his early involvement in the most groundbreaking forms of entertainment – motion pictures in the 1910s, radio in the 1920s; his energetic contributions to the emerging fields of marketing and advertising; as well as his pioneering role in the establishment of the "human relations" sector in business.

And through it all, Billy B. Van promoted Newport as "The Sunshine Town" and touted the principles of caring and community that made it "depression-proof" even in the midst of economic downturn. Hard times didn't dampen the spirit of "The Sunshine Town," and neither did they dampen Billy's.

Find out the secrets behind this peddler of sunshine – and why he loved his adopted hometown so much – in *Billy B. Van: Newport's Sunshine Peddler*.



**Billy B. Van,
the Sunshine Peddler**

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Museum phone number 603-863-1294

Call the Museum number above for appointments to tour the Museum at alternative times

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NHS Board Members: Cathryn Baird, Pres.; Jerry Hagebusch, V. Pres.; Larry Cote, Museum Director; Jackie Cote, Treas.; Jayna Huot Hooper, Secretary; Dick Gassett, Priscilla Hagebusch, Rita James, Laura McCrillis Kessler, Dean Stetson, Ann St. Martin Stout, Stan Sweeney.

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 \$ _____ Operating \$ _____ Buildings \$ _____

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

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