

Warren Town History

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On November 9, 1780, the Honorable John Thorp and 67 associates received a grant for a parcel of land in Vermont. A condition of the charter was that each proprietor, his heirs or assigns, plant and cultivate five acres and build a house, or have a family settle on each respective right or share of land in a specified time, or the share would revert to the freemen of the state to be re-granted. November 12, 1824, the town was enlarged by four tiers of lots from the town of Lincoln.

The Vermont Year Book 1977 listed Warren with an acreage of 27,390. Shares were granted for the benefit of a college (Middlebury College), county grammar schools, Minister of the Gospel, support of the ministry, and an English school. The survey was related to such points as birch, basswood and spruce trees with measurements in links, degrees and chains from the Roxbury and Lincoln Corners. The town was named for Dr. Joseph Warren, president pro tem of the Provincial Congress, Major General of the militia and the first American killed in conflict at Bunker Hill .

Among the early settlers were Samuel Lard, Seth Leavitt and Asahel Young, a famous bear hunter. Young built a log cabin on land owned by Eldridge Hanks and a grist mill near what later became Warren Village. The first child born in town was the daughter of Ruel and Olive Sherman on October 17, 1797, and the first death recorded was the mother, Olive. The first male child born was Lucius, son of Seth Leavitt on March 5, 1798.

Warren was a wilderness and the people who settled here were pioneer type, resolute people, not afraid of hardships encountered in backwoods life with the strength and courage to endure. They raised their own food: corn, potatoes and vegetables being their main crop. The only sugar available was maple sugar made in open iron kettles over an outside fire. The buckets were handmade of wood. They made their clothes from wool, flax and cloth. They wove their own cloth and knitted their socks, sweaters and mittens. Baking was done in stone or brick ovens. Candles or pine knots and fireplaces supplied their light. It was not until 1850 that kerosene lamps and lanterns became available. Fishing and hunting were also sources of food, as well as the wild berries. The land was cleared, making small farms, crops were planted and homes built. They kept cows, sheep and poultry. Milk was set in small pans to let the cream rise and skim off to make butter and cheese.

A small hamlet grew in the eastern part of town away from the river, the likely travel lane of the Indians. There the best farmland lay, and the larger farms developed. At this location the business of the town was transacted from 1798 to 1824.

Warren became an agricultural town with grass as king and stock growing a leading branch. Later, this would change to an industrial nature with the addition of mills, tannery, stores, and all the service occupations that become a need in a community. It again changed to a recreational area when Sugarbush Ski Area became the leading factor to dominate the valley with the related businesses of the present day.

On September 20, 1798, the first town meeting was held. Samuel Lard was elected the first town clerk, and the selectmen were Ruel Sherman, Joseph Raymond, and Seth Leavitt, thus making the necessary machinery that is still in existence for the successful operation of a town.

On September 2, 1800, the first Freeman's Meeting was held with twelve men taking the Freeman's Oath. Their meetings were held at the homes of the selectmen until 1812. For the next 18 years they met at the Red School House. The first State Representative was Thomas Jerrold in 1809.

The first frame house was on Judge Epham's farm at the north end of the Post Road, just south of the Warren/Waitsfield line. In 1812, a two-story house was built on J.W. Eldridge's farm at the south end of the Post Road, near the far corner of Fuller Hill and Plunkton Road. It was used as a tavern and a post office. James Eldridge was the postmaster. It was 22 years after the first settlers came before he got his appointment. Most of the lumber for the early homes was sawed by Henry Mills who lived near what is now Alpine Village. The first settlers made use of the streams, and many mills were in operation over the years.

Religious meetings were held at the homes of Joseph Eldridge or James Richardson until the Methodist Church was built in 1833-1834. The lumber for the beams was drawn by oxcart from Ripton and the pews from Middlebury. That church remained a place of worship for over 100 years.

The Warren River Meeting House was built in 1838 by the Free Will Baptists, Universalists, Congregationalists, and Methodists.

When the resident doctor left the area, Warren also shared the services of Dr. Shaw of Waitsfield who covered the entire area. He was the original "Country Doctor," inspiring confidence in his healing and visiting all hours, day and night with his horse and buggy and, in later years, his automobile.

Before 1805 all education was given in the homes, but then it was voted to divide the eastern part of the town into two districts and build a schoolhouse on the southeast section of the Four Corners at Roxbury Mountain Road. The Village School was organized in 1823 but not built until 1829 on the south side of the Common. As the population increased, new districts were added until 1845 when there were fourteen districts with three hundred scholars. In 1885 a town school system was adopted, the town paying and hiring the teachers. Parents still furnished books, paper, pencils, pens, and slates until 1895 when the town began furnishing these supplies.

The Village School House was remodeled in 1952 by adding a third room, drilling a well, and installing a heating plant. By 1960 it was the only school remaining in operation. All students were bused there. But the growth caused by the recreation industry made it necessary to build a new school on the Brooks Field Recreation Area and send the seventh and eighth grades to Harwood Union High School in Duxbury. (The East Warren School did reopen for a short time because of population increases but eventually closed to be rented for community services - in recent years, a store.)

The Village School was turned into offices for public officials and space for the library which had been started in 1900. The move to the Municipal Building (formerly the Village School House) took place in 1974. Now known as the Warren Public Library, the facility had 1,000 books which were cataloged according to standard library procedures with the help of volunteers and Librarian Lois Kaufmann. Many improvements have been added since.

The Postal Service was the main link with the outside world through the closest rail connection in Roxbury. From 1828 to 1907, two Warren post offices received mail from carriers on foot, horseback or team driven. It came about three times a week until 1880 when it came daily. Gladys Bissell was the last driver to make the route by car. After that, mail arrived via Middlesex, then Montpelier, by Star Route Delivery.

The telephone service prior to 1908 came over this route to the office in the home of Wyd McClaffin at the base of the mountain. Later, service came through the Valley over the Waitsfield-Fayston Telephone Company owned by Alton Farr. The switchboard was tended by a housewife between her daily chores until it grew large enough to find different quarters with a young lady as "Central." As late as the 1950's, only two lines serviced Warren. It was an important day in 1961 when this company switched to a dial system, but it also meant the end of social life on the telephone when one could listen in or take messages for a neighbor.

Much of Warren's forest land is owned and controlled by the US Forest Service. Some of this is under lease to Sugarbush Ski Resort, thus making the recreation of skiing available to the country and abroad.

For pastimes and entertainment there were the "raisings." Everyone got together to "raise" a barn or house, get wood for their firewood, logs to saw for lumber, husk corn, tie quilts, etc. These events became social events with local music and food supplied by the neighborhood women.

In the meantime, settlement was growing along the Mad River and on land to the west. Dams were built, mills appeared, and the supply and service establishments required by these people came into the picture. In 1807 the Mad River Turnpike, now Route 100, was surveyed through Granville Woods, and in 1817 William Cardell built a toll road on Lincoln Mountain at a cost of 50 cent/ rod. In the span of twenty years, the Village of Warren was settled. The first house was built by Daniel Ralph and the second by Richard Sterling. In 1826 a Village Common and the cemetery were laid out, and by 1829 the Brick School House was built. It was also at this time that by an act of the Legislature the town was annexed to Washington County. Formerly, it was in the County of Addison. From then until 1840 the Freeman's Meeting was held alternately at the Red School House in East Warren and at the Brick School House in the Village. After that, it was held in the Village.

By 1872, the population had grown so that neither the school nor the larger homes could accommodate the meetings, and it was voted to build a town hall. The land, just enough for the building, was given by Ed Cardell.

At the first meeting in the new building, the Freeman's Meetings were dissolved. The Town Hall still remains the location for town meetings and elections, as well as many social events. For years, the small children were "baby-set" at the village school while parents attended Town Meeting. Meals were served at the noon recess by the Church Ladies. People got reacquainted with friends and neighbors. Everyone attended. The men grouped together on one side of the hall and transacted all the business. As times changed, it was no longer the pattern when women entered town government as treasurer, town clerk, auditor, school director and lister.

Everything that came to the Valley had to come by rail to Roxbury and be hauled seven miles over the mountain. By 1889 the number of mills and businesses had reached its peak. Many carpenters, blacksmiths, boot and shoe dealers, truck dealers, an insurance agent, clergymen, dressmaker, sleigh

manufacturer, undertaker and lumber dealers had been added to the types of ventures. A snowroller was purchased in 1890 to maintain the roads, and horse and sleigh were the winter method of travel. Now large trucks and equipment plow and sand to accommodate the traffic that has developed.

During the later 1800s the dairy industry grew. A creamery was started in East Warren. Later the business was transferred to the Village. By the early 1900s many had left the farms for mill work and industry. Young people left to seek life away from the rural areas. The communities of Stetson Hollow, South Hollow, West Hill and Grand Hollow were showing the change from the agricultural pattern, and land was showing regrowth. The cream, separated from the milk on the farm, was sent to the Warren Co-op building in 1910. Soon the Hood Milk Company started buying fluid milk for shipment to Boston. The farmers who had brought cream to the Coop to be made into butter now started shipping whole milk, and the Co-op closed, to be replaced by steel tank trucks picking up the milk directly at the farm where it was stored in cooled steel bulk tanks until pick-up time. In 1950 only one farm was operating in South Hollow, and that was Frank Hartshorn still shipping milk on a small scale, and by 1965 only six remained in the farming industry. Many farms had been combined to make larger operations. In 1970 only David DeFreest, Rupert Blair and George Elliott were farming and shipping their milk.

Sugaring became a big operation each spring. The methods had changed through the years to the use of an arch inside a sugarhouse, fed by wood, and huge pans containing the sap boiled to a specified density and graded by color and flavor and packed in metal containers to be sold direct to consumers. This was a change from the time of packing in huge drums and selling the syrup by the pound to processing companies and also from the time most syrup was made into sugar. All these changes were brought on by new methods in refrigeration, shipping, packing, etc. Most every farm had a sugarhouse, and during the middle 1900's Warren was the site of much maple production. But because the farms were abandoned, sugar maples sold for lumber, and hard work involved in this production, the number of operations grew less and less until 1978 when there were only the Hartshorns, D. Ernest Ralph, Albert Neills and small homeowners making syrup. In the 1980's the Hartshorns were hauling their sap to be processed at their farm in Waitsfield.

In 1927 the worst flood ever to hit the Valley washed away the foundation to the covered bridge which in later years was restored with part of a grant established by the Vermont Legislature for the protection of local historic resources. The bridge was closed to all truck traffic to preserve it. Many roads were damaged, along with all four dams in the Village. It took away the J.A.P. Stetson Mill, the Bradley Mill at the south end of the Village, damaged the Grist Mill, and took the old Plyna Parker mill of 1877, then owned by Mary Bradley since 1919. Most every road at some place was impassable with deep gullies made by the heavy rains of that November. No vehicles could get into the area. The Village was cut off at each end with bridges washed away. This flood brought an end to the waterpower era.

Fire, as well as high water, plagued the mill business. Palmer and Wakefield lost a mill by fire. Henry W. Brooks lost his by fire in 1947 and again in 1949. And the Bobbin Mill originally built by Erastus Butterfield in 1878 burned down in the early 1930's when owned by Parker and Ford. They began rebuilding on a shoestring in 1932, but fire struck again before completion. It was finally rebuilt and run as a mill for twenty-five years. Under the ownership of Barry Simpson and David Sellers in 1974, the Bobbin Mill was again damaged by fire. It was rebuilt and became the birthplace of several manufacturing businesses, including Union Woodworks, Vermont Iron Stove Works, Vermont Castings, North Wind Power Company, and Dirt Road Company.

The H.W. Brooks Mill, which was located below the covered bridge in the Village, had burned in 1949 but was rebuilt by a co-op in 1951. It eventually fell into disrepair and was razed in 1984 by Macrae Rood, who built a home with a hydroelectric generator on the old mill site. This is the only vestige of the waterpower era which spawned sawmills, cider mills, clapboard gristmills, mills, clothespin and butterpail factories along the Mad River, Lincoln, Stetson, Bradley, Clay, and Freeman brooks. Beginning in 1845 with Carlos Sargent's mill at the south end of the Village, a great surge of mill production had run its course.

The ski industry has had a profound impact on the character of Warren, despite its meager beginnings. The first ski tow in the Mad River Valley was established by the Warren Outing Club in the late 1930's. It was placed on the Ulie Austin property, now a town-owned source of gravel, by Outing Club organizers Charlie Townsend, David McNeill, Nap Drinkwine and others. The tow rope was provided by Roy Long, with the machinery obtained from the Suicide Six ski area in Woodstock. The project came to a close at the outset of the second world war, with the departure of many young men to serve in the armed forces.

The next ski area was in 1945-46 when Roland Palmedo was negotiating for months with the Hartshorns and Riches, who were under great pressure from town residents for a ski lift on the Hanks property, so called because of the areas early settlers. The adjacent Hartshorn land was also desired as part of the project. Unfortunately, the winter in which the development was to start found little snow in the area, and Roland Palmedo went on to establish Mad River Glen ski area instead.

Next came the Sugarbush ski area, which was founded by Damon Gadd in 1958. Shares were sold to form the company, with many local people buying shares. The first trails were located in the Asbury-Allen basin, which was accessible only by jeep over logging roads at that time. The ski area operation was a dream of Gadd and General Manager Jack Murphey, who had a vision of a playground for skiers. The season of 1958-59 started with a 3 seat gondola which was manufactured in Italy, at that time the longest lift in the country. There was also a T-Bar for beginners and the Castlerock lift. Tickets were \$4.50 a day. Peter Estin was the first ski instructor. The Sugarhouse, now Sam Ruperts, was the area's first restaurant. Other amenities which soon followed were the Valley House and the Gate House.

For the next thirty years Sugarbush would continue to influence the shape and direction of the town. New lifts and trails were added, and Sugarbush Village has been established as a center of vacation accommodations and commercial activity. A building boom unmatched in Warren history brought confusion about regulation and zoning to control or at least direct this development. The development has continued, and many problems of environmental concern have become important issues. With the addition of the Glen Ellen ski area in Fayston, Sugarbush has indicated a desire to further expand the ski area to include trail and lift development of Slide Brook basin. With such plans anticipated, there is little doubt that Sugarbush will continue to play a major role in the town's future, as it has in the past.

In 1963 Warren Ketcham founded an airport to establish a center for soaring. He picked this area between the ridges where thermal waves of air held gliders aloft. Use of this facility has increased for both commuters and sky fans.

On October 23, 1977, an addition to the Fire House was dedicated in honor of John Snow, fire chief for twenty-two years. This volunteer group was organized under the leadership of Clayton Neill, its

first fire chief, in 1947. It was first quartered at the north end of the Village until the present structure was built into the bank at the entrance of the Common. It remains a volunteer force with members dedicated to their work, and a very efficient crew has developed. Up-to-date equipment has constantly been added.