

# Under the Hump

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- Next Meeting Tuesday, February 12th, 7 pm. Crossett Brook Middle School
- Bring your fundraising and future plans for the Society with you to review at the February Meeting.
- May 13th - Meeting 7PM
- June 21st and 22nd Vermont History Expo Tunbridge Fairgrounds

## CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBER?



Last Issue  
Jim Harvey

## DUXBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2008

I am happy to report that that we have had great momentum since the first meeting of the Society in November of 2005. Over a hundred members have recently renewed their dues for 2008 which is a great indicator that we are moving in the right direction. The next step is to keep our momentum going and decide where we would like to go and how we would like to get there.

Many people have enjoyed the programs that have been presented. The people involved are at a loss in producing/recording these programs with out video equipment. We have been fortunate in the past to be able to borrow equipment, but the Society does not have any equipment of their own.

Many have expressed an interest in collecting oral histories from Duxbury citizens on video. Others are interested in producing videos for our programs so that the kinks are worked out and flubs are edited out before it is presented to the members. An opportunity that we don't have in a live presentation.

We have also been fortunate to receive documents and artifacts which are now in our care. In order to care for them properly they need archival quality containers all of which come at a price. Others have expressed an interest of some day having our own physical space for meetings and storage of our artifacts.

While you may be interested in some, none or all of these ideas we need to hear from you to see what direction the membership would like to take the society. What do you or would you enjoy in the future? Let us know at the next meeting so we can plan for our future.

Currently our funds are raised through the membership fees and some small fundraisers. Most of our existing budget is spent on the production of the newsletter, hosting for the website and general minimal operating expenses. So if we want to move the Society forward we need to generate some money to take us there.

We did the plant sale last year which provided us with some funds. Many people were impressed with the quality of the plants and were thrilled with home delivery. Although delivery was not part of the original plan it may be the thing that makes it a blockbuster fundraiser. Another suggestion was to produce a cookbook of recipes from members along with olds photos of Duxbury. If we had video equipment we might be able to record and edit our programs and sell them on CDs around Christmas time for stocking stuffers. We could also solicit donated items to make a raffle basket and sell tickets.

These are only a few ideas of what we could do in the future and some of the fundraising ideas to get there. What would you like for the future of the Duxbury Historical Society? Bring your thoughts to the meeting and let's go over them. Don't be shy, we have a lot of business at the next meeting so bring your thoughts and ideas to share.



# D U X B U R Y H I S T O R I C A L S O C I E T Y

WE WANT YOU TO JOIN US!

The Duxbury Historical Society invites you to become a member.

Interesting information and programs for all members.

**Fill out the membership information and forward your payment along with this card to :**

Mark Morse, Treasurer  
Duxbury Historical Society  
804 Vermont Route 100  
South Duxbury, VT 05660

ANNUAL DUES \$10.00

☐ Renewal ☐ New Membership

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive the newsletter by:

☐ mail ☐ email ☐ both

ARE YOU ENJOYING THE NEWSLETTER AND ARE NOT YET A MEMBER?

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING THE DUXBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO SUPPORT THE EFFORT AND EXPENSES INVOLVED IN PRODUCING THE NEWSLETTER.

YOU CAN JOIN BY FORWARDING YOUR ADDRESS AND \$10 MEMBERSHIP FEE TO MARK MORSE, TREASURER

## V E R M O N T   H I S T O R Y   E X P O   2 0 0 8

Once again we will be participating in the Vermont History Expo being held this summer at the Tunbridge Fair grounds on June 21st and 22nd. The theme of this years expo will be Industry and Innovation: Vermont Ingenuity. We have selected the title of *STUMP TO MILL* for our presentation which will showcase the sawmills and the products that Duxbury produced in those mills.

As in previous years, they will have many exhibits from Vermont towns. In addition they will have Vermont craftsman demonstrating trades from years gone by. New this year will be Civil War Sunday highlighting its impact on Vermont's home front.

If you have any ideas or artifacts for use in our display or can volunteer some time as a host in our booth, contact Don Welch.



## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM

**Herbert G. Hunt, Jr. was the Farm Superintendent at the Vermont State Hospital from May of 1955 until October of 1966. He joined forces with Marsha Kincheloe who was the Nursing Administrator at the hospital and created the book EMPTY BEDS - A HISTORY OF VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL. Most of this information is from that book and provides much more information on other aspects of the hospital as well.**

The Vermont Asylum for the Insane in Brattleboro was established in 1836 for the care of the mentally ill in the state. By 1888 the Asylum had 461 patients admitted which was over the recommended capacity of 400. The trustees deemed that any further growth was against the individual welfare of the inmates. In view of the overcrowding in Brattleboro, Dr. Don D. Grout, representative from Stowe introduced a bill in the 1888 legislature, which was enacted, "to provide for the care, custody, and treatment of the insane criminals of the State." In 1889 parcels of land were purchased from C.C. Warren to establish the Vermont State Asylum for the Insane. In 1892 in an effort to reduce the confusion between the Vermont Asylum for the Insane and the Vermont State Asylum for the Insane, the Vermont Asylum in was renamed to Brattleboro Retreat and it has been know by that name ever since. The Asylum located in Waterbury was later named the Vermont State Hospital.

In addition to the patient wards located in Waterbury they had a boiler house, kitchen facilities, laundry, employee

chambers, and the farm. The farm generated the food for the inmates and employees. They had 150 milk cows with additional young stock along with cattle, horses, hens and



THE HEN HOUSES WASHED UP AGAINST WEEKS BUILDING FROM 300 YARDS AWAY

other livestock. The surrounding fields generated the produce for the Asylum and the hay for the livestock. About 1897 the decision was made to build a new barn large

enough to accommodate the growth of the institution. The old barns were small, scattered and inconveniently located to be efficient. In the spring of 1897 the trustees leased the farm of James Sommerville in Duxbury for a period of two years and then purchased it for \$8,000. It included a house that was used as a residence for the swine herdsmen for about forty-five years. This house was near the Town Clerk's office and has since been demolished. The property also included a large barn that was used to winter hogs and store straw, shavings and apple boxes. The slaughter house was built in 1905 and was used for many years.

The first farm superintendent was James Shipman who served for 21 years before an injury forced his retirement in 1912. Mr. Shipman through his many years of service brought the farm from a few common cows in 1891 to an efficient farm



ORIGINAL DAIRY BARN, LOCATED WHERE THE MEDICAL/SURGICAL BUILDING WAS LATER BUILT. DESTROYED IN THE 1927 FLOOD. PHOTOGRAPH IS AROUND 1915. BUILT IN 1896.

## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM

operation. When he retired there were 700 acres of farmland, 70 registered Holsteins, a large number of beef cattle and young stock, as well as 300 hogs. There were ten acres of gardens for produce as well. W. O. Lowe was appointed to the farm superintendent position when Mr. Shipman retired in ill health.

In 1915, H.C. Douglas succeeded W.O. Lowe as farm superintendent. In the summer of 1917 a henery of 250 hens was erected to supply the hospital with fresh egg for special diets as well as the poultry needs for the holiday season. The piggery that year not only supplied all the needs of the hospital but was able to sell several tons of pork products and over \$1,500 in pigs. Arthur Bailey who started as a night nurse in 1904 succeeded Mr. Douglas as farm superintendent upon Mr. Douglas's resignation on April 1, 1919. In 1920 a full-time herdsman was hired due to the increased size of the herd. On June 3, 1920 the Washington County Farm Bureau Association along with the Waterbury Board of Trade held a meeting and field days on the Hospital grounds. The president of the Eastern States Agricultural and Industrial League was in attendance. The morning was devoted to the inspection of the Hospital farm and cattle and outdoor sports were provided.

As we all know the flood of 1927 had a devastating effect on the town of Waterbury. The Asylum and the farm were no exception. Attempts to save some of the cattle were made, but the flood waters proved devastating and they were lost along with most of the other livestock. One thing salvaged were three teams of horses when they were taken to high ground. Any buildings that remained were so severely damaged that they had to be taken down once the flood waters receded. November 30, 1927 a special session of the Legislature was convened and generated Act No. 1. which appropriated 8.5 million dollars of which \$400,000 was to be used to reconstruct the barns. When the barns were reconstructed they were built on higher ground in Duxbury Corner where route 100 currently goes near the Holy Cross and Duxbury Corner Cemeteries.

The barn was the second largest in the state and was quite an enterprise. In addition to supplying all the food for the Asylum they were profitable in the sale of cattle and swine. Most of the manpower to keep the farm running was provided by the patients. Because their labor was not paid it made for a very profitable enterprise. The patients seemed to enjoy the work on the farm and were eager to join the farm workforce. Great strides were made in the breeding of Holstein cattle and they had some of the finest cattle in the country. To watch the farm in operation would be impressive even by today's standards.

During the 1940s there were periods that the water supply was inadequate to supply the cows at the dairy barn. Even more importantly there was not enough pressure to provide water to the second floor if they ever had a fire. This would later prove devastating. On Saturday, July 4, 1942 the dairy barn was destroyed by fire. At about 10:30 PM Harold Hanley, L.O. Poland and Everett Steele were passing by Duxbury Corner when they saw smoke pouring out of the ventilators of the large dairy barn. They hurried to the stable and due to their quick work, and courage in the face of great danger they were able to release most of the cattle from their stanchions before the arrival of some of the farm employees. Before they were driven out by the flames, these two groups were able to save all except one cow, six calves and three bulls. Also lost in the fire was all the hay and most of the farm machinery. All that was left the next day were two silos and the foundation. The silos were so badly damaged that they had to be taken down.

The next morning it was discovered that a patient was missing from the South Side. Merrill Bennett, a deaf and dumb patient who had spent much of his life in the institution, had experienced an emotional upset a few days before on the ward and he decided to escape, set fire to the dairy barn, wreck a Central Vermont Railway train, and commit suicide. Fortunately, all his plans did not materialize.

Monday morning when the storekeeper returned to work he found a note that had been placed on the door of the storehouse the night of the fire by Mr. Bennett announcing his plans. The search for him in the Slip Hill area of Middlesex revealed that he had indeed made an effort to chop through a number of railroad ties and also tried to pull out one of the spikes holding the rails. Because of his lack of strength he was unsuccessful in this endeavor. He was spotted by a search party but eluded them and made his way to Montpelier Junction where he hopped a train for White River Junction. He was apprehended there by an immigration officer and held until Dr. O'Neil returned him to the hospital.

Mr. Bennett was discharged several years later and lived in Waterbury. He became known as Cat Man because of his routine of collecting food for and feeding a huge number of cats. As he became older and unable to care for himself he was readmitted to one of the geriatric wards in 1987. He was a frequent sight around the hospital grounds with buckets of food scraps feeding "his" cats around the powerhouse.

Within two days of the fire, Mr. Parizo, the head carpenter, with the assistance of farm employees had installed a floor and stanchions to tie of 68 head of cattle in the tool shed adjoining the horse barn. The milking machine equipment was also made



## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM



*New dairy barn and silos built in Duxbury to replace the barn that was behind the Hanks Building and wiped out by the 1927 flood.*



## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM

ready to operate and milking was done in this shed for a year. The problems of rebuilding was a serious one. Due to the war there were many delays in the arrival of materials. It was also



INTERIOR OF THE NEW BARN  
BUILT IN 1929



one of the most severe winters in recent years, but eventually the Cummings Construction Company completed the new barn on the old foundation and it was occupied on July 7, 1943.

From this point on the farm went on to be a premier Vermont farm. The farm included 1,500 acres of tillable land and forest. The 300 acres of tillage and pasture supported and dairy herd of 150 head of registered Holstein cattle, and a swine herd of 400 animals. Garden produce was grown on 35-49 acres and supplied the food for approximately 1,000 patients that resided there and 300 employees who ate at least one if not two meals a day there. The 1,200 acres of woodland contained enough standing timber to meet the ongoing needs of the hospital for many years. In 1968 the hospital realized as its share of a lumbering contract approximately 50,000 board feet of dimension lumber and boards. They also developed 35 patients with on the farm training under the supervision of the farm employees. Some patients were enrolled in the Manpower Development training program. These patients worked in all phases of the farm operation and at the conclusion of their five month training they were placed in gainful employment outside the hospital.

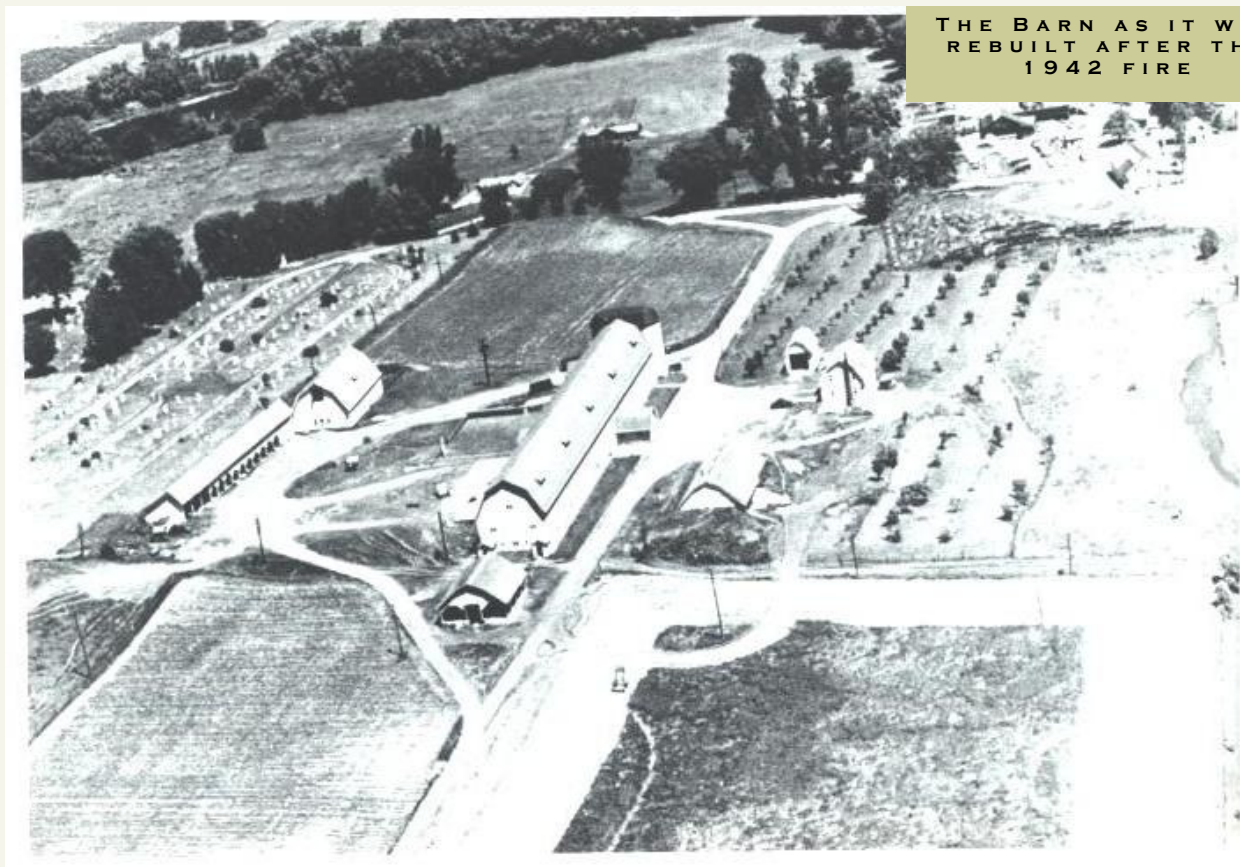
The success of the hospital was also the demise of the farm. Dr. Chittick retired in 1968 and Dr. Brooks left research to become the new Superintendent. He carried on the philosophy of Dr. Chittick namely, "the objective of the Vermont State Hospital is to restore the patient to the level of health and function that will allow him to leave the hospital to continue his convalescence elsewhere." The fifteen years of rehabilitation effort had resulted in the discharge of most of the patients who provided useful labor to the hospital and farm. This was good for them but up to two thirds of the workforce in 1954 was unpaid patient labor. The loss of up to 90% of this labor force ultimately made the hospital more expensive to run even though the patient population was smaller. It was hard for the general public and legislature to understand how a shrinking population and mushrooming budgets could coexist. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1966 was interpreted to mean that patient labor should no longer go unpaid, and that a great deal of what had been called Industrial Therapy was straight exploitation.

*The 1969 report for request for FY1970 reported that in addition to being responsible for the livestock they were also responsible for the labor and equipment of the garbage and rubbish removal for the hospital; trucking of commodities for food service; summer and winter grounds care maintenance at the hospital and help with maintenance of the children's summer camp.*

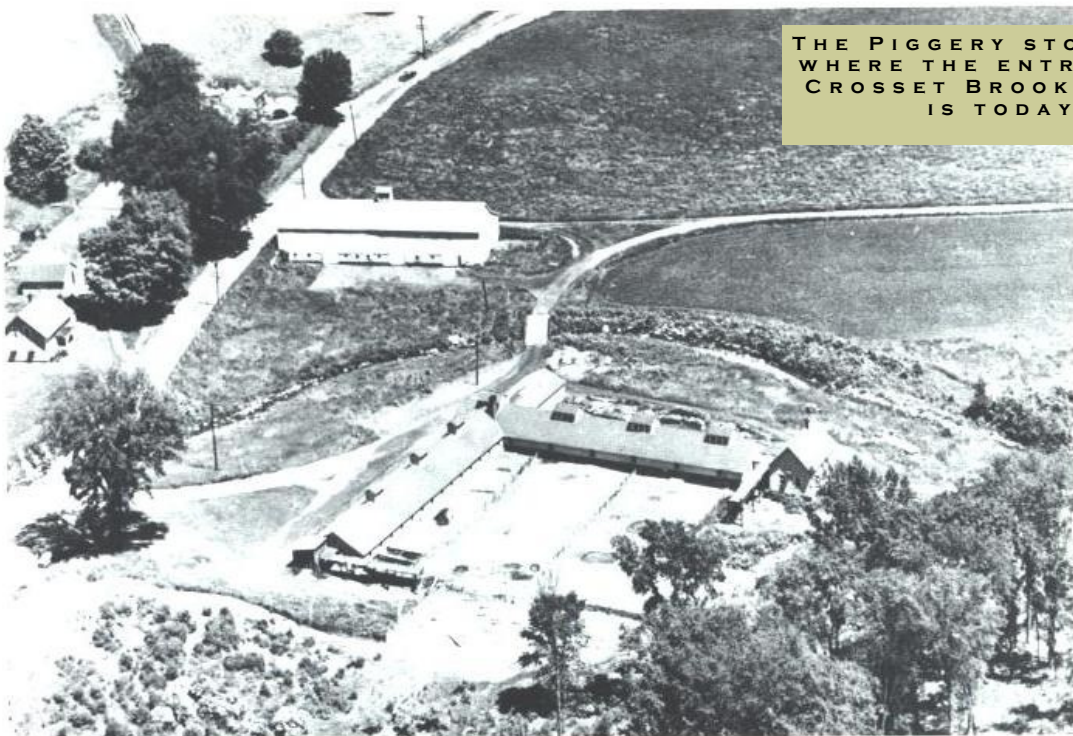
*The report states that there are 17 employees, however, if the farm were to modernize four Farmer A positions would not be needed. This modernization would not only save money but it*



## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM



THE BARN AS IT WAS  
REBUILT AFTER THE  
1942 FIRE



THE PIGGERY STOOD NEAR  
WHERE THE ENTRANCE TO  
CROSSETT BROOK SCHOOL  
IS TODAY.

## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM

would also further the objectives of the Hospital's training program by providing a facility commensurate with today's farms. A patient trained to shovel manure is of little value to a farm with a gutter cleaner.

It is requested that permission be granted to start a small beef herd on the hospital farm using Holstein bull calves born each year. At present these calves are sold at birth to local farmers to raise for veal. Farm grown roughage could be used for feed. \$1,500 would be required to build a three sided shelter for winter and for remodeling a section of the present bull barn for starting calves. An estimated 25,000 lbs. of beef could be produced for hospital food service, annually, after the first 18 months. This would amount to approximately 30% of beef requirements at the hospital which is an estimated value of \$12,500.

#### New Equipment Needed:

**Gutter Cleaner.** Presently all manure is removed manually. Since the farm is used as a training facility, rather than a place to occupy patient's time, it needs equipment comparable to that on farms patients will work on when they are discharged.

**Pipeline milker system.** Presently milk is carried in containers by hand. This system would reduce labor and improve sanitation.

**Self propelled silage cart.** At present all silage is shoveled manually.

**Lawn tractor with attachments.** A considerable amount of work on the 20 acres of lawn is manual. The unpaid patient labor to do this had almost disappeared. This piece of equipment would permit the proper maintenance of the lawns and would also have a snow-blowing attachment, eliminating the need to hand shovel the walks.

**Wagons, chassis.** Bales of hay currently loaded manually on trucks. To reduce the labor required for this task, the farm could purchase four chassis wagons and supplies, and construct four wagons. These wagons in combination with the rental of a bale-thrasher would decrease the needed labor.

**Oil fired boiler for the piggery.** At the present time the boiler used for the slaughterhouse and auxiliary heat for the baby pigs in winter is wood fired. This requires 150 cords of wood a year. The wood is available, but the labor cost of cutting and hauling

is prohibitive. Therefore, we request an oil fired boiler. There is no longer unpaid help available for work in the woods.

The requested appropriation of \$161,621 for the farm program will produce over a million pounds of pork, 40 tons of vegetables, and a small amount of beef, all of which are used by the hospital. It will also produce about \$12,000 in the revolving fund, received from the sale of cows, calves, and pigs and used mostly for the purchase of meat by the kitchen. Also, it provides the labor and equipment for the upkeep of the hospital grounds both summer and winter, and an agricultural training program for the patients.

In July, 1969, a legislative committee began studying the value of all four of the State's farms: Windsor State Prison, State Hospital at Waterbury, Weeks School in Vergennes and the Brandon Training School. Some legislators stressed the therapeutic value of the farm and others agreed with Budget and Management Director, Ron Crisman, that it was a losing proposition. Mr. Crisman managed a chain of supermarkets in the mid-west before taking a job with the State Budget and Management Division. The total farm spending in the previous year was \$148,131, about \$7,000 more than the produced value.

Mental Health Commissioner Leopold and Dr. Brooks argued that "produced value" was not being computed correctly in that no dollar credit was given to the training or therapeutic benefit, or lawn mowing, or snow removal, and transport of produce and meat to the kitchen, all of which would have to be purchased in the

absence of the farm. The State administration, under Deane Davis, was in an austerity mood and when Commissioner Leopold tried to argue that closing the farm would be a false austerity, he was publicly criticized for "taking up his time with farm problems when this is not his area of expertise."

It was the beginning of the end. There was a brief effort to have a Farm Coordinator, responsible to the Vermont Department of Agriculture, coordinate sharing and efficiency among all four State farms. The failure of this measure is illustrated in an October 10, 1970 memo from Beryl Rosenstreich, Hospital Administrator to Mental Health Commissioner Leopold.

"I am concerned about the way the farms are being 'coordinated'. There does not appear to be a recognition of the

CATALOG OF THE  
Complete Dispersal of  
**Vermont State Hospital Herd**  
AT THE FARM  
Waterbury, Vermont  
Monday, July 12, 1971  
Starting Promptly at 10:30 A. M.

The herd comprises 150 head of Registered Holsteins, nearly all bred at the Farm, and combining some of New England's popular and proven bloodlines, Shaws Ridge through the Silver Medal Production - VG 88 sire Shaws Golden Creté Una; Lemax (and Ivanhoe) through the Silver Medal Production - VG 85 sire Lemax Ivanhoe Commander, Walhewdon, Maview and UNH through the Walhewdon-bred bulls Walhewdon President Vernon, Walhewdon Leselya Nugget, and Walhewdon Royal Prince Baron. Some 40 head are by sons of Osbornedale Ivanhoe, 35 are by Nugget (Ivanhoe grandson), and 25 are from Ivanhoe granddaughters. The herd has followed a definite breeding program built around the above sires, with judicious and selective use of AI sires. The result is a closely bred herd with many family groups of exceptional breeding potential.

1970 DHIR LACTATION AVERAGE:  
74 LACTATIONS - 15,256M 3.9% 600F

LOCATION: Farm is on Route 100, one-tenth mile south of Route 2, easterly of the center of Waterbury, and of the Hospital grounds. Easily reached from Route 60 via Route 2. If traveling East to West, exit off 60 at Middlesex (first Exit beyond Montpelier) to Route 2, towards Waterbury, to Rte. 100 South. Traveling West to East, take Waterbury Exit from 60, to Route 2, proceed through Waterbury, past the Hospital grounds, following Rte. 2 to Rte. 100 South.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Gateway Motel, in Waterbury, and Camp Meade Motor Court, Middlesex, are the nearest Motels, with an ample selection of others in Montpelier.

MR. KENDALL THORINGTON, Farm Mgr.		
MR. WAYNE SHERMAN, Herdman		
T. R. LANGDELL, Farm Telephone: 402-244-0812	W. A. BAKER, Box 9	
Millford, N. H.	GARY CULBERTSON, Bradford, VT.	Ester, N. H.
KENNETH FOWLER, Durham, N. H.	RALPH GUSHEE, Fryeburg, Me.	Sale Manager
Ringsmen		

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Please Bring This Catalog With You to the Sale.



## VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FARM

*budgeting structure of the institutions. For example, the Farm Coordinator directs Farm Manager Thorington to send livestock to the Vergennes School, when the Vergennes School is unable to pay for these items either in money or in-kind.*

*The hospital has the labor, the supplies and the facilities to raise a small beef herd from its Holstein bull calves. This idea was approved by the Farm Coordinator. Yet he wanted the six bull calves saved for this purpose to be shipped to Vergennes.*

*Mr. Thorington has informed me today that the Farm Coordinator has ordered him to plant 90 acres more of corn to feed more cows, which will be raised to produce more milk for more institutions. This cannot be done unless money is provided for more cows and renovations in the barn. Who will be getting the milk? Mr. Thorington has to know who to listen to soon, since fertilizer orders and other supplies have to be made this winter (from what budget?).*

*Last week Commissioner Eurich called me inquiring as to why I did not send down two heifers to Vergennes. I tried to explain, but believe I was unsuccessful. I suggested to him that what is needed is more coordination involving the institutions; he agreed."*

The "Coordinated Method" resulted in an estimated loss for FY1970 of \$27,774.89 to \$52,774.89, compared to about \$7,000 in 1968. The files are thick with rough drafts of various people's proposals of how to run the farm better and the value of the farm. On May 12, 1971 there was a clear conclusion in a memo from Department of Administration Commissioner Richard Mallary to Dr. Brooks.

*"Per our meeting this morning, I am sure it was understood that no one is to make any attempt for disposition of properties concerned with farms either real or personal until further notice from the office of the Commissioner of the Department of Administration."*

The dairy herd was auctioned July 12, 1971.

In June of 1971 Rapheal Lowe leased the farm from the State with about 200 tillable acres and retained some of the milking cows from the State herd. Much of the surrounding timberland was then owned by the Forest and Parks Department. Other parcels were sold and are now occupied by the Scribner farm, Thatcher Brook school and the Duxbury gravel pit. Rapheal continued to farm there until a fire consumed the barn in 1994. Some of the buildings still stand today and are currently on the market to be sold by the State.



"DURING WORLD WAR II THERE WAS TROUBLE GETTING BUILDING MATERIALS, AND, AFTER THE BARN BURNED IN 1942, THE SILO WAS REBUILT WITH NAILS THAT WERE NOT RUSTPROOF.

IN THE LATE 1950'S WE WERE WORKING AROUND THE BARN AND STARTED HEARING AN OMINOUS REGULAR PING, PING, PING. WE ALL TOOK OFF FOR THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD TO WATCH AS THE NAILS SHOW OUT LIKE BULLETS UNTIL THE WHOLE SILO SPLIT OPEN. IT WAS THE EVENT OF THE SEASON, WITH A BIG SPLASH IN THE NEWSPAPERS. THE SILO COMPANY WROTE AN ANGRY LETTER TO THE HOSPITAL FOR ALLOWING PRESS COVERAGE THAT NAMED THEIR COMPANY, AS IF THE HOSPITAL SOMEHOW HAD CONTROL OVER THE PRESS

HERBERT G. HUNT, JR.

## WATERBURY RECORD JULY 9, 1942

**BENNETT, 34, VANISHED  
THE NIGHT BARN BURNED,  
PICKED UP WEDNESDAY NIGHT  
AT WHITE RIVER JUNCTION**

Merrill Bennett, deaf and dumb, for twenty four years an inmate of the State Hospital here, escaped about nine-thirty on the night of July 4 shortly before the blaze was discovered that razed the hospital barn in Duxbury, and confessed setting the fire when he was taken into custody Wednesday afternoon at White River Junction by an immigration inspector. He was brought back to Waterbury on Thursday morning by Dr. J. C. O'Neil.

Bennett's disappearance was not discovered until the following morning, which was Sunday, but he was not suspected of having set the fire until he implicated himself by pinning a note on the storehouse door Sunday night. The note was garbled and the hospital authorities who had been familiar

with his habits and had been accustomed to communicating with him through similar notes, assumed that he may have seen the fire after escaping and claimed having set it when he hadn't. The note also indicated that he intended to try to wreck the train at Slip Hill, which was the first definite clue as to where he had gone, and then commit suicide. Evidence was found at Slip Hill that he had attempted to chop railroad ties with an axe stolen from the Hospital and had attempted to pull out spikes, but apparently didn't have the strength to do serious damage.

He was sighted in the vicinity of Slip Hill on Wednesday afternoon by Chief of Police John Griffiths, but eluded the searching party and was not heard from again until he was picked up at White River. He had apparently hitch-hiked toward Montpelier and Barre and hopped on the train at some point in between, possibly at Barre-Montpelier Junction.

Bennett is deaf and partially dumb, having limited use of a few words. He is about five feet seven inches tall, weighs about 110 pounds and has light brown hair, blue eyes and



*July 4, 1942, Barn fire.*

## WATERBURY RECORD JULY 9, 1942



*Remains of the barn after the 1942 fire.*

sharp features. He has an erect posture and walks with a confident swagger. He is mentally deficient but keen in many respects, and he had been kept at the hospital principally because of his handicap.

His confession was made with some difficulty but by means of notes, acting out various episodes and adding the few words he could utter, the story was finally pieced together. He had stolen a key from the nurses' quarters after they had gone off duty at eight o'clock Saturday night, and he apparently knew that there would probably be no one there until they reported back at eleven. He got a chair and a step ladder which he placed against the wall permitting him

to escape about nine-thirty. In corroboration of his story of having set the fire, he was later identified as having been seen crossing the bridge to Duxbury shortly before the fire was discovered; and a cow was found loose when Everett Steele, Harold Hanley and L.O. Pollander, who discovered the fire, arrived on the scene.

The theory of spontaneous combustion from wet hay which was first advanced, was not seriously considered. Bringing in the hay had been delayed by the wet weather and even if some of it had been wet when brought in, the immensity of the barn and the facilities for ventilation would make spontaneous combustion unlikely, especially so soon after the hay had been brought in.

The investigation of the blaze was conducted by Sheriff Lawson, Deputy

Fire Marshal Francis Regan, J.W. Kirby for the Fire Marshal's office, William Toole, railroad detective, and Chief of Police John Griffiths.

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The Vermont State Hospital barn located at Duxbury Corner was destroyed by fire which broke out about 10:30 Saturday night. Many people have reported hearing a noise as of an explosion just before flames started shooting through the roof of the barn.



## NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF 1942 FIRE

Harold Hanley, L.O. Pollander and Everett Steele, who were driving through the Corner and were attracted by smoke pouring out of the ventilators, were the first ones on the scene and succeeded, at the risk of their lives, in getting out about half of the valuable herd of Holstein cattle before others arrived. Seventy cows and one bull were taken out. Dry cows and young cattle were in the pasture.

Aside from the stock rescued the entire contents of the barn were a total loss.

Included in this loss were two bulls, valuable and well bred. The senior sire, Carnation Butter King Ormsby was a descendant of the world record cow Carnation Ormsby Butter King. The other bull was a son of the senior sire. No exact value had been set on either bull but they were two of the best bred animals in Vermont.

One cow and a pen of 15 calves were lost, also approximately 100 tons of hay and two car loads of grain. All of the farm machinery excepting the haying equipment was in the barn and included in this loss was a new ensilage cutter, new corn planter and new grain drill.

Two tile silos 40 feet high remain standing but are ruined and will be torn down soon.

On one side of the barn was the house occupied by William Louizell, a state employee and his family with sleeping quarters for several other employees. This and the horse stables and a long row of tool sheds on the other side of the barn were saved by the prompt action of the Waterbury Fire Department.

It is the general belief that had there been a wind many homes in Duxbury Corner would have been in danger.

On Sunday temporary stanchions were built in the tool sheds for the cattle which were being milked by hand.

After the flood the barn, which was 286 feet long by 42 feet wide was built in 1928, the location being chosen on land too high to be affected by floods.

The loss, which is much greater than was originally estimated is fully covered by insurance.

It is expected that rebuilding will start soon.

Waterbury Record, July 9, 1942

BURLINGTON  
FREE PRESS

JULY 6, 1942

## State Hospital Barn Burns; 90 Head of Cattle Saved

Three Men Rescue Valuable Holstein Herd  
At Imminent Risk of Their Own Lives;  
\$25,000 Loss Is Covered by Insurance

Special to the Free Press

**WATERBURY, July 5.**—Loss of \$25,000 was incurred late last night when fire destroyed the large barn of the Vermont State hospital in Duxbury. The origin of the fire is unknown, but it is believed to have been due to spontaneous combustion. The loss is covered by insurance.

At the risk of their own lives, three men rescued the 90 head of cattle in the barn. The men, E. R. Steele, L. O. Pollander and Harold Hanley, who live nearby, rushed into the barn and although they were unfamiliar with the layout succeeded in releasing the cattle. They had to work in the dark while above them roared an inferno of flames. The upper part of the structure, where the hay was stored, had burst into flames at about 10:30.

Two valuable bulls were lost, one being worth \$1,000, the other a lesser amount. Two cows and a dozen calves were also lost. Destroyed too was valuable farm equipment, including an ensilage cutter, the milking machinery and 100 tons of hay and a carload of grain. Today the 90 rescued cows of the Holstein herd had to be milked by hand.

The barn, which was 292 feet long by 60 feet wide, was the second largest barn in the state. After the flood, it was built in 1928 at Duxbury on ground too high to be affected by any future floods.

The flames burst suddenly from the upper section of the barn and the first alarm was put in by L. C. Garvey, who lives across the river from the barn. Today nothing remains of the barn except two stone silos 39 feet high.

The Waterbury fire department succeeded in saving the horse barn and the house occupied by the employees.

## MEMORIES OF THE STATE FARM

In my early childhood, growing up in Duxbury in the 40's and 50's, the State Farm was a bit of mysterious place to me, and, I suspect, to most of the youngsters growing up in Duxbury. It was a huge farm compared to most of the farms in Duxbury. The barn was a magnificent structure, well-kept, freshly painted with several outbuildings for tools, young stock, feed and the like. Route 100 at that time did not travel close by the farmhouse and cattle barn as it now does. It traveled from the intersection of Routes 100 and 2 over to the Duxbury School, up the hill and very close to the houses that are located across from the current entrance to Crossett Brook Elementary School. A person driving or walk-

maybe foolish - perception of the hospital patients who worked on the farm, but it was definitely a factor in keeping one's distance from the farm.

This above perception changed for me when the Duxbury schools consolidated in 1951. Crossett Hill School closed, and I started attending Duxbury Corner School. Among the students at Duxbury Corner School were the Green family members, children of Ross and Helen Green. Ross was the head herdsman at the dairy farm. I soon became friends with the Green kids who were about my age, especially with Burt who was one grade ahead of me in school. My friendship with Burt and his brothers and my mild interest in animal hus-

bandry led me to join the local 4-H group, which was headed by Burt's dad, Ross Green. And with those new friends and my new membership in the 4-H club came a new view of the state farm. No longer was it a mysterious, off-limits place for me; I now saw a whole new side of the operation. We held meetings at the farm, listened to Ross and other dairy farmers and state executives explain some of the basic science of animal husbandry, learned a bit about farm tools and machinery, and, probably more appealing to me, discovered many of the nooks and crannies on the farm and saw the uplifting interaction of the VSH patients with the Green family and the farm operation in general.

The Green family was a decent, kind family. I never heard any of them talk in a threatening or demeaning manner

to the patient work crew. Ross was very generous of his time with the young boys in the neighborhood and was happy to share his knowledge of the farm industry and animal husbandry with us kids, and his wife Helen opened the doors of her house to us boys on days we had our 4-H meetings. I must admit that I was not much into farming; I guess my Dad's genes ran true in my DNA. He did not mind a bit of horse manure on his boots, but he preferred it coming from following a good skid horse or a team in the woods. I didn't last too long in the 4-H program and was definitely not one of Ross's star pupils, but it did not cause him to treat me dismissively. He was a kind, decent guy, with a ready smile and generous nature. And my membership in 4-H brought me to a whole new appreciation and understanding of the State Farm.



*Holstein Herd, State Hospital for the Insane, Waterbury.*

ing on Route 100 did not get a close up view of the cattle operation; it was up on a knoll above the road and quite a distance from it, accessed by a long driveway. The pig farm was a different story. The main road went right by the piggery, as we called it. A passerby got a good look at the piggery - and got a good whiff of it during the summer months.

The cattle operation was secluded both by its location and the common knowledge that patients at the Vermont State Hospital worked at the farm. Most folks, especially youngsters, who had no connections to VSH were a trifle skittish about interacting with the patients at the hospital. The thought of heading up that long, secluded driveway and encountering a VSH patient was a frightening thought for a wee lad - no telling the horror that might result from such a chancy journey. I later learned that this was a childish -

## MEMORIES OF THE STATE FARM

It was immediately obvious that the patients loved their assignments at the farm. It was their farm in their way of thinking, and Ross reinforced this feeling. Many years later, when I worked at VSH during the summers while attending college, I realized that my conclusions were right on the mark. There was a waiting list of patients who wanted to work at the farm. Vermont was much more an agrarian society back in those days and I'm sure that most of the institution folks who enlisted for duty on the state farm came from farming backgrounds. There was an obvious comfort level and love of the farm routine in those hardy souls, maybe a special feeling of returning to a better, happier time in their lives. I guess none of us really know such things, but it was obvious that they were very comfortable and happy in their daily farm routine. The employees on the hospital wards would go into the dormitories at 4AM in the morning to wake up the farm crew. Almost without exception, the patient would be sitting on the side of the bed, fully dressed, waiting to get up into the back of the stake-bed truck and head to the farm. And once a patient was selected for farm duties, it was usually a long term assignment; he/she would absolutely refuse to willingly give up his farm job.

I remember vividly my first sight of the cows and bulls up close. They were absolutely magnificent animals. They dwarfed in size and pedigree any stock I had ever seen on my Dad's side hill farm. My father was not a dairy farmer, he was a logger, so we always had a couple milk cows and never had a bull. And the milk cows were not exactly prize winners. Good, trustworthy cows which provided us an abundance of milk for a large family, but not the stuff you see in 4-H magazines. The state farm cows would enter the barn at milking time with bags full of milk that looked like they were defying load limits. The bulls were so big that they were downright scary looking to me. Huge Holsteins; way bigger than any I had ever seen on any farm. The hogs over at the piggery were similarly excellent stock; big healthy looking sows and huge boars.

It was only after seeing the operation up close that I began to appreciate the scope of it. The farm produced all the milk and butter needed to feed the VSH population, with any excess production going up the road to feed the hogs at the piggery. The piggery provided a constant source of meat to the VSH population and recycled all the excess and waste food from the hospital. There was a huge, gas or electricity fired cooker on wheels that was backed up to a ramp at VSH's kitchen. All the clean, edible scraps were dumped into the cooker, cooked to kill germs/bacteria, and

transported back to the piggery for supplemental feed for the pigs.

The farm enterprise included several fields of vegetables both on the farm proper and other sites around the Waterbury/Duxbury area. Hay, corn, beans, carrots, potatoes and other crops were harvested over on the fields adjacent to the VSH buildings in Waterbury, on the Randall Meadow fields, on river side fields along the North Duxbury road, up on fields on Crossett Hill, even far up in fields in the woods behind what is now the Chevrolet dealership in Waterbury. Vegetables were harvested for food for VSH, the excess vegetables canned for later consumption or fed to the pigs. The various operations required a minimal civilian farm crew since the great majority of physical labor was performed by the patients.

One scene that still dwells in my memory was watching the State Farm teamsters go by the Duxbury Corner School, driving manure out to the meadows on the North Duxbury road or harvesting hay and/or crops from those fields. The horses were beautifully matched teams, harnesses sparkling clean, the equipment modern and well maintained. I remember one of the drivers very well, Charlie Keyes I think was his name. Charlie had a gruff voice, a grizzled face, fierce looking eyes, a curved stem pipe in his mouth. Twice as scary looking as any patient, I recall thinking. And I think Charlie liked to reinforce that image to us youngsters as he passed by the school yard. He'd glare fiercely at us, eyes aglow, belly protruding, pipe clenched in his teeth (what there were of them), and he'd sometimes utter a gruff greeting to us. (Or tell us to get to hell out of the road.) He looked like something out of a Guns episode - and not one of the good guys, either.

Father Time caught up with the State Farm. I'm sure a great majority of people assumed that the patients were being treated unfairly, laboring for such meager recompense. I guess they're right. But I'm just as sure that none of those people ever asked the patients about their take on the matter. That period in local history ended soon after I left the Waterbury/Duxbury area for a 20-year journey to the Washington DC area. When I returned to Duxbury in 1983, the farm was no longer active - that big beautiful barn looked tired and in need of paint, weeds growing around its mighty foundation; a sad sight for someone who recalled its past glory. I did not grieve much when it finally burned to the ground; better to see that once proud structure consumed in fire than falling apart a day at a time. I still recall those previous days, however, in a positive light, happy to have witnessed a bit of the magnificence of that local landmark in its heyday.

**Many Thanks to Steve Grace for contributing this article.**



## CAN YOU IDENTIFY US?

We need your help. In an effort to collect, archive and preserve some of our history we would like to put some names to the faces. Do you know who these people might be? The teacher is Charlotte Barney Clifton. If you know someone that might be able to identify some faces, please pass it on and bring the information to a meeting or contact Maureen Harvey or Donnie Welch.



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If you have any comments or contributions for the newsletter we would love to hear from you.

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DON'T FORGET THE NEXT MEETING FEBRUARY 12TH  
CROSSETT BROOK MIDDLE SCHOOL - 7 PM

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