

CAMBRIDGE HARKENER

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE OF CAMBRIDGE, VERMONT

Vol. XVI, No. 3

June 2021

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The Mystery of Merritt Wilson

It is rare to not find a trace of a New Englander in any sort of records pertaining to births, deaths, marriages, taxes, censuses, wills, town records, etc. A thorough search reveals only one mention of a Merritt Wilson – on page 606 of Abby Hemingway's Vermont Historical Magazine: "Military 1813. Merritt Wilson and Ira Hawley were killed at the battle of Odletown, Canada... Their bodies were brought from the battlefield, and interred with their kindred in Cambridge."

Ira Hawley is easy enough to find. He was the son of Elisha Hawley, a Revolutionary War veteran, and his wife Hannah Dean Sayles. Born in Windsor, VT in 1783, he came to Cambridge with his parents around 1794, and married in 1808 Susanna Fasset, daughter of another early Cambridge settler, John Fasset Jr. On 28 Apr 1813, Ira enlisted in Capt. John Wires' (of Cambridge and buried in Hopkins Cemetery) company, 30th infantry regiment for the duration of a year. The 30th regiment is noted as participating in the last American invasion of Canada – the Second Battle of Lacolle Mills.

Although his death record could not be found, and no gravestone remains, Ira is most likely buried in the East Cambridge Cemetery where his parents and other family members are interred. The Vermont Historical Magazine notes that "Hawley's widow kept the handkerchief that her husband had upon his neck, and the ball that lodged in the handkerchief, when he was killed."

*Lacolle River Blockhouse
Built in 1781. Now a museum.*

The Battle at Lacolle Mills – sometimes referred to as Odelltown – was the last of a series of failed American attempts to invade Canada during the War of 1812.



Battle map showing the Blockhouse, Stone mill, and Stone barn in which 500 British and Canadian forces held off nearly 4,000 Americans on the afternoon and evening of 30 Mar 1814.

Early History of Cambridge

by Ida Morgan Anderson

Beginning in 1935, Ida Morgan Anderson began serializing a column on the History of Cambridge in the *Cambridge Town Crier*. Many of our readers may remember the series of 27 Installments. The Harkener continues publishing the installments for a new audience on the assumption that the copyright (if it ever existed) has long since expired. We hope you will enjoy these "blasts from the past."

Installment Eleven

In 1895 a terrible epidemic of diphtheria raged in the northern part of the town. In a distance of two miles there were sixteen deaths. Mr. and Mrs. Edward P. Mudgett buried a little girl, Mr. and Mrs. Lorenzo Rice buried a little girl and two boys, Mr. and Mrs. Romeo Case buried a little girl, Andrew Chase buried his wife Eurette, three boys and a girl, (his whole family), Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wheeler buried a little girl, Mr. and Mrs. Hial Chase buried a little boy, and Mr. and Mrs. Jonathon Blaisdell buried two girls and two boys. Only two family circles remained unbroken.

Cambridge formerly produced great quantities of maple sugar. In an article written for the "*Cambridge Transcript*" in 1891 or 2 by H. W. Parker, a lawyer well known throughout the county, he says: "Probably the largest maple sugar market in the world is Cambridge, Lamoille Co., Vermont. The state of Vermont manufactures more maple sug-



ar than any other section in the world, and Cambridge more than any other town in Vermont. There has probably been made in this town, this season, (and the crop is hardly an average,) not far from forty thousand dollars worth. There has probably been marketed in Cambridge this year from 170 to 200 tons, and the quality is the finest that can be produced. And yet, a safe estimate would be that not more than one-half to two-thirds of the maples are tapped. To many not acquainted with the facts in this connection, it has been a wonder why the town was so well to do and rated so high as a farming community. This is one of the reasons."

The price of sugar varied from four to nine cents

per pound, and as the demand for maple lumber increased, many farmers cut off their sugar places and sold them to lumber men. A few hundred dollars in a lump, then, looked better to them than a smaller annual sum extending through many years. So they killed the goose that laid the golden egg.

Many sheep were raised in Cambridge. Chiefly Merinos, the royal sheep of Spain. When the weather and water grew warm enough in May or June, came sheep washing in the Lamoille river at the Boro. Two pens for "before and after" were



fenced off on "the gravel" by the little bridge and the flock of sheep were driven into one. Several men were necessary. Each sheep was taken into the water and the wool rubbed and squeezed till it was clean, and was then turned into the pen with the renovated members of the flock. When the last one was finished they went bleating home white as daises. It was a tedious job but it had consolations. The men always carried a bottle of "the crather" and took a "wee drop", perhaps two or three drops to prevent taking cold from long standing in the water. There were several strains of Merino sheep and some yielded a fleece of from ten to sixteen pounds of washed wool. A sheep owned by J. E. Gates, Senior, yielded the heaviest fleece ever sheared in northern Vermont. Nearly twenty-one pounds. Owner of the great flocks in the west came to little Vermont for their choicest breeding stock. The highest price ever paid for one of these kings of the sheep pasture was eleven hundred dollars.

"To breeders of Addison county goes much of the credit, first in importing Spanish Merino sheep, then for their improvements of the breed to such an extent that the blood of Vermont Merino was sought for throughout the world, even from Argentina, South Africa and Australia. Great were the experiences of the late Charles R. Witherell, his son Stowell, and H. J. Bissell as they crossed the oceans delivering to these far off lands the Merino products of the then far-famed pastures of old Vermont."

Although they would not know it for some time, the very next day, allied forces entered Paris, France defeating Napoleon and restoring Louis XVIII as king effectively ending the Napoleonic Wars of which the War of 1812 was a by-product.

But what about Merritt Wilson? He is not listed in the muster rolls of any regiments involved in the battle. An exhaustive search produced no vital records or tombstone. There were other Wilsons living in Cambridge at that time, Roswell, Durfee, and John, all brothers who came to Cambridge by 1802 from Leicester, MA. Some of their sons had "Merritt" for a middle name, so there is obviously a connection.

While transcribing Cambridge's vital records, I did come across another individual who was killed on 30 Mar 1814. Solomon M. Campbell was 16 years, 11 months, 9 days at the time of his death. His gravestone in Mountain View Cemetery reads, "who was instantly killed by musket ball in the attack on Lacole mill in Odletown." He had enlisted on 5 May 1813 also in Capt. John Wires' company, 30th regiment for 1 year, serving with Ira Hawley.

Further investigation revealed his birth on 22 Apr 1797 in Cambridge to William and Mary "Polly" Campbell, and that his full name was Solomon Merit Campbell. His sister Jennet "Jane" married John Wilson, with another sister Fanny marrying John's brother Durfee.



William Campbell died on 13 Apr 1807 "death occasioned by the falling of a Tree" – the spot marked by a grave-like marker off North Cambridge Rd. Solomon Merritt's mother, Mary, died just 2 years later in 1809 leaving him an orphan at age 11. What most probably happened was that his oldest sister Jennet, now Wilson, and her husband John took him in. Jennet named one of her sons "John Merritt Wilson" and Fanny named one of hers "Solomon Merritt Wilson." Therein lies the confusion in names. I believe that Merritt Wilson and Solomon Merritt Campbell are one and the same. As often happens with oral history, the truth of the matter is there, just confusion in the correct details.

Solomon's gravestone is found in the oldest part of Mountain View Cemetery in the same row as his parents. Behind him are buried his sister Jennet and her husband John Wilson, punctuating the connection between the two families.

Below the inscription described above is a few lines from "An Elegy on Lieut. De Hart" written in 1780 by Col. David Humphreys:

*He died in the dawn of applause,
His country demanded his breath;
Go, heroes, defend the same cause,
Avenge with your country his death.*

<http://www.usgwarchives.net/pensions/1812/vtindex.htm>

https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/51_1812_9.aspx

<https://www.northamericanforts.com/Canada/qc.html#lacolle>

<https://legionmagazine.com/en/2012/05/battlefields-then-and-now-e2-80-93-the-war-of-1812-2/>

Town of Cambridge vital records

<https://www.bartleby.com/338/597.html>

Ancestry.com

Upcoming CHS Programs

*Wednesday August 11th 7:00 pm
Cambridge Christian Fellowship, Cambridge Village*

From the Parlor to the Polling Place: Stories and Songs from the Suffragists Linda Radtke



Linda Radtke, in period garb and “Votes for Women” sash, celebrates the centennial of the passage of the 19th Amendment, specifically highlighting the decades-long persistence of Vermonters, both women and men. Music was essential to the movement: each state convention of suffragists began and ended with songs such as “Shall Women Vote?” “New America,” “Giving the Ballot to the Mother” or “Voting as we Pray,” as well as rousing Christian hymns. Radtke also traces the movement’s alignment with other social justice initiatives such as temperance, labor conditions, wage equity, peace, and children’s welfare.

Touring the state in 1870, suffragist Lucy Stone urged resistant citizens to see women’s involvement in civic life as “Enlarged Housekeeping,” expanding women’s traditional efforts to nurture hearth and home to a wider focus to improve the greater community. (The Rutland Herald reporter expected “Harpies and Amazons,” and was impressed by suffragists’ mild and rational approach!) Both the songs and stories in Radtke’s engaging presentation, accompanied by pianist Cameron Steinmetz, highlight Vermonters’ efforts from 1840-1921, as they lobbied in churches, at “parlor meetings” at town halls and at the State House for total enfranchisement.

*Wednesday September 8 7:00 pm
Warner Lodge, Jeffersonville*

The History of Cambridge High School Reg Wilcox

Cambridge’s first high school was opened in 1864. In 1914 the town voted to open a larger school on a plot of land received from Abbie Varnum. That building, now the Cambridge Elementary School, is the subject of an unique history of the Cambridge High School as told by one of its alumni. Come to hear how the growth of the town is reflected in the growth of its high school.



NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERSHIP REGARDING PROPOSED SALE OF A PORTION OF THE SWEET HOUSE PROPERTY

Pursuant to Article 12 of the Cambridge Historical Society Bylaws, notice is hereby given that a Special Meeting will be held on July 1, 2021 at 6:00 pm at the Warner Lodge, on School Street in Jeffersonville. The meeting will be in person, and will follow COVID guidelines that are in effect as of July 1. The purpose of the Special Meeting is to discuss and vote on whether the CHS Board of Directors may sell a portion of the Sweet house property (house, garage, and generously sized lot). The Special Meeting will be open to all persons. However, per the Bylaws, only "members in good standing" (any member whose annual membership is current as of June 1, 2021) may vote on the proposal.

More Information

The timeline of events leading to this proposal is as follows:

- 1999: CHS purchases the Warner Lodge on School St, where we presently meet and store most of our collection. CHS has no plans to sell the Warner Lodge.
- 2008: Arlan Sweet leaves the Sweet House property to CHS in his will, with a reversionary interest granted to Cambridge Elementary School.
- 2010: Sweet House and a portion of the land is rented to operate the Mary Elizabeth Preschool.
- 2019: Cambridge Elementary School conveys its reversionary interest to CHS by Quitclaim Deed after voter approval at Town Meeting, giving CHS marketable title to the property.
- March 2020: COVID epidemic strikes. Schools (including the Mary Elizabeth Preschool) close.
- April-August 2020: CHS waives five months rent so that the Preschool can survive.
- August-September 2020: CHS invests over \$12,000 in repairs and improvements to Sweet House, to properly maintain the structure, and also to help the preschool meet COVID guidelines.
- January 2021: Preschool gives notice that the school will not be operating at the Sweet House after July 1, 2021.
- February 2021: CHS Board of Directors accepts Preschool's notice to cease rental. CHS Board begins process of deciding what to do with the Sweet House property.
- April 2021: After considering various options, the CHS Board of Directors decides to pursue the option of selling the Sweet House. Four realtors are contacted to obtain market price estimates.
- April-May 2021, Preschool inquires about lease or purchase of Sweet House to continue preschool program there.
- May 2021: CHS Board of Directors decides that the best option is to subdivide the Sweet House lot, selling the house, garage, and a generously sized lot. CHS would retain the barn and a lot at the rear of the property for CHS use, along with land necessary for driveway access and utilities.

The CHS is governed by its Bylaws. Article 6 of the Bylaws states that the business and affairs of the CHS shall be managed by the Board of Directors. However, with respect to the sale of an asset like the Sweet House, Article 12 of the Bylaws requires that there be a vote of the membership at a Special Meeting called for that purpose after 30 days written notice. Approval by 2/3 of the members attending that meeting is required before the asset can be sold.

The Board of Directors would like to proceed to sell a portion of the Sweet House property, (house, garage, and generously sized lot) and has called for the July 1 Special Meeting to seek membership approval for that sale, as required by the Bylaws.

As indicated above, the Board of Directors wants to retain a portion of the property for CHS use. The barn on the retained land is presently used to store large items in our collection, mostly antique farm implements. We do not want to lose that storage! The retained land will provide space for outdoor events. We will also retain a strip of land from Main Street for future driveway and utility access. This parcel could also be sold as a village lot in the future, though there are presently no plans to do so.

As of May 24, 2021, no firm price has been set, a survey is not complete, the property has not been listed for sale, and no specific discussions have occurred with any party. The Board of Directors is in the process of dealing with the many details that must be addressed to prepare for a possible sale. Some of those details will probably be firmed up by July 1.

The Preschool has approached the Board of Directors about possibly purchasing the property so it can continue to operate at the Sweet House. The preschool has operated in the Sweet House for 11 years, and has provided a very valuable service to our community. It has much community support. The Board would like to see the school able to continue in the Sweet House. At the same time the Board's primary responsibility is to the CHS membership and the wellbeing of CHS as an organization. It is too soon to know whether a mutually agreeable arrangement can be worked out with the preschool, but that is being explored.

The CHS Board of Directors is seeking your approval to proceed with sale of a portion of the Sweet House property, understanding that price, buyer, and many other details are yet to be determined. The Board feels confident that it can responsibly decide on the best sales option and handle the details, once your general approval is received. We would appreciate your support, and encourage you to attend the July 1 meeting.

Thank you from the CHS Board of Directors and Officers: Joel Page, Geana Little, Peter Opstrup, Richard Gagne, Diancy Boyden, Shirley Opstrup, Lynn Austin and Rick Fletcher! If you have any questions or comments prior to July 1, please send them to cambridgehistoricalsociety.vt@gmail.com, and we will try to respond.

May 24, 2021

Cambridge Historical Society
PO Box 16
Jeffersonville, VT 05464



Things are opening up and so is the Historical Society. Beginning in August we will start hosting in-person meetings. We currently have no ability to transmit our programs over the internet, but we are actively researching that option and hope to be able to let those from away, or who don't like traveling at night, have access to the programs.

CHS will be holding a special meeting on July 1st to vote on the sale of part of the Sweet House property. Only paid up members are eligible to vote, but all are welcome to attend. Unfortunately, we will not be able to have remote attendance. Please read the announcement in this issue of the Harkener and contact us if you have questions.

This Newsletter is one of the perks of membership, so to continue receiving The Harkener renew your membership, and THANK YOU.