

THE BRICK CHURCH • BETHEL, VT
Built 1816

Bethel Historical Society

And Museum at the Brick Church

Newsletter

A Whistle Up The Valley

UPCOMING EVENTS

Regular Meetings at Bethel Public Library

February 6, 2006, 7 PM

March 6, 2006, 7PM

April 3, 2006, 7PM

May 1, 2006, 7PM

June 5, 2006, 7PM

Special Events

April 19, Joint Appraisal Night

With Stockbridge Hist. Soc.

At Stockbridge Elem. School

With Appraiser Jim Marquis

May 4, Bethel Library

The Italian Community at the Flats

Presented by: Bill Johansen

May, (date tba) Joint meeting with

Bethel Rotary

Janet Hayward Burnham

Presents: Pvt. Charlie Fairbanks

June 24,25

Vermont History Expo

Have you bought
your
Bethel Historical
Society 2006
Calendar yet?
Pick one up at a
store downtown, or
contact us.
We appreciate
your support!

After almost 50 years in the works, the history of the Peavine Railroad is becoming reality in the form of a book. This is the work of the late Wes Herwig.

A lengthy article about the history of the Peavine Railroad, written by Wes Herwig, appeared in the Autumn issue 1963 of *Vermont Life* magazine, page 44.

Judging from this article, the book will be of great interest to Bethel.

Original plans were to build the *White River Valley Electric Railroad*. However, the idea of the "electric" was dropped almost immediately and later the "valley" was also deleted from the name. Officially it was called the *White River Valley Railroad*, but it was more commonly known as the *Peavine Railroad* because of its twisting, winding course.

According to Wes's article, "for a time, Peavine locomotives operated over the *Bethel Granite Railway*, a six mile spur, bringing rough stone from the hills to the finishing sheds below."

"The White River Railroad might well have been labeled an "uncommon" carrier. Its train crews were friendly and obliging to the fullest. Stopping to deliver a package from the drug store to some wayside farmhouse, to discharge a fisherman at a remote trout pond, or to pick up school children when the weather was bad were all in a day's work."

According to Mim Herwig, the book is scheduled for publication in March of this year. It will be available to the members of the Bethel Historical Society. Look for more details in the next newsletter.

The Peavine Railroad seemed to be plagued by difficulties from the start.

About 1901 a many-versed poem by an anonymous author appeared. Later he was identified as the son of a local minister.

The poem became popular because it expressed how many folks felt about the little railroad.

"The lame old train leaves Bethel
On Schedule time they say,
It gets to Stockbridge near to night
And Rochester next day."

"Oh railroad of the valley,
You are slow, slow, slow.
And 'ere the robins sing again
You will go, go, go"

On April 30, 1933, the Peavine Railroad operated for the last time.



The famous Number 4 at the station in Bethel.

Following is an article by Manuel Miller, which first appeared in the Bethel Historical Society Newsletter, Issue #1, October, 1994. Manuel Miller (1908-1994) was a well-respected citizen of Bethel. He was an inventor, businessman, church elder, historian, and dedicated family man.

A Tale Of Mountain Music

Manuel S. Miller

It sometimes seems that certain persons are born to have stories told about them. I truly believe that the Reverend Zeb Twitchell was indeed one of those remarkable people.

He was born and brought up over Stockbridge Common way nearly two hundred years ago. After a few false starts in his extreme youth, he eventually became a Methodist minister and preached in a number of churches in this area including the church in Lympus. He became highly esteemed in the Conference and was honored in many ways.

Before entering the ministry he had been a school teacher and also, being a gifted violinist, he derived great enjoyment as well as some extra income from playing at local gatherings and dances. Of course, after he took up preaching he naturally stopped playing for dances as the Methodists of those long ago days took a very dim view of such goings on. But Zeb couldn't resist picking up the violin in the privacy of his home and giving forth with some very "un-churchly" tunes.

Of course people going by his house were bound to hear him playing, and some found fault. In the course of time, word got through to the Presiding Elder that something was going to have to be done about the Reverend Zeb and his fiddle.

The next time the Presiding Elder came to Lympus for a Quarterly Conference he called Zeb to one side – out in back of the horse-sheds where they could be sure of privacy – and then proceeded to lay the matter on the line. He started in, "Brother Twitchell, before taking up a very personal matter with you, I want to tell you that your ministry here in Lympus has been very fruitful and that you are personally well thought of by the members of the Conference, so I hope you won't misunderstand me when I say that this violin playing has got to stop; and I mean S-T-O-P!

Why I have even been told that some mischievous people over Camp Brook way have been passing the story around among superstitious folk that this violin of yours is not an ordinary instrument but is actually the 'Devil's Lute' and that it is sure to bring evil to you and everyone associated with you!" Zeb had been expecting something of the sort but he found it hard to take such bitter condemnation of his beloved violin and its music which he had always thought of as a proper vehicle for the expression of the natural joy of good people on such occasions as the marriage of young folks, the harvesting of crops, the raising of barns, and the warming of new homes. And that is what Zeb told the Presiding Elder, adding that he was of the opinion that the consignment to the devil of all sprightly tunes was a mistake that church people would some day come to regret.

The Presiding Elder was a man of mature years and an understanding heart and he found it easy to believe that Zeb's soul had yearnings that only the music of his violin could satisfy. So, after giving the matter some thought, he made the following proposal to Zeb, "Supposing we could find a remote place up on the side of the mountain, at least a mile from human habitation, and you were permitted to play the violin from dark to dawn on one night of each year, what night would you choose?" That was a hard question to answer but Zeb came up with a good choice. He said, "Well, of all the occasions which have a seasonal

connection, I think I like the corn huskings best. I would choose some clear, balmy night during the corn harvest.” In those days everybody in Lympus raised corn, good old fashioned yellow field corn. They had it ground at the mill and it was an important part of their food, year ‘round’. The Presiding Elder was pleased at the choice and he held out his hand to Zeb, “It’s a deal, but don’t breathe a word to a soul.”

In the days that followed, Zeb scouted out a cozy little shelf up on a flank of Lympus Mountain. And he walked to and from it many times so he could find his way there by the dimmest moonlight. The summer passed and the bright September days ripened up the corn. Finally the time came that Zeb had been waiting for. As soon as it got dark he took his violin up to his mountain nook, rosined up his bow, and played and played and played.

Now we all know Lympus is famous for its echoes. There is a place up the road a little way from here where you can hear the ticking of an alarm clock for a quarter of a mile, I am told. So it was not strange that a lone traveler passing over the old road which used to skirt the base of the mountain, late that night, should hear violin music bright and clear although the road at no point came within a half mile of the place where Reverend Zeb was blissfully fiddling his tunes.

Some time later that night the traveler banged on the door of the tavern down at Lilliesville and excitedly told a strange tale of music on the mountain road. The innkeeper tried to quiet him by explaining about the effects of moonlight and night air at high altitudes, but he didn’t quiet down much until he was given a mug of hot peppered rum. Then, gasping for breath, he allowed himself to be led off to bed.

Of course, before the next day was over, the story had spread up and down the valley. But it was more or less discounted as just an innkeeper’s yarn. In the several years that followed, a number of farm folk in the upper valley who had occasion to step out into their yards late at night at that time of year – possibly to investigate a noise in the chicken coop or a barking dog – would hear the violin music as described by the lone traveler.

Naturally, the Lympus people talked about this. And being intelligent folk, it didn’t take them long to guess what was going on – it was the Reverend Zeb playing his violin and maybe he was telling them it was time to get in their corn. Of course they couldn’t talk to him about his night-time violin playing because they were quite sure he would have to stop if a public issue was made of it.

So it went on, year after year. The Reverend Zeb Twitchell did well in the ministry. He was assigned to large and important churches and even became Presiding Elder of the Danville District. But he never neglected to come back to Lympus Mountain when the corn was ready to pick. And all these years it seemed to the people of Lympus that the corn bore better than ever before. The ears were large and well filled out and the kernels were hard and bright.

The day came when the Reverend Zeb Twitchell was called to his reward. On a hot, hazy day late summer afternoon the tall corn waved gently in the fields of Lympus as his old friends and neighbors, their children and grandchildren, laid him lovingly to rest.

They all knew that his violin was stilled, but could the good folk of Lympus be blamed for stepping out into their back yards late at night when the corn stood ripe in the fields, and listening for the sound of distant music? And strangest of all, nobody was surprised when they heard the rollicking notes of Zeb’s violin coming down from Lympus Mountain true and clear as ever.

And the story goes that as long as corn was raised in Lympus, the sound of the violin could be heard on the mountain at harvest time.

The Vermont History Expo 2006

will feature **Vermont Women** -
Bethel's entry in that category will

THE TWO MARYS

Mary Parker and Mary Waller

Mary Parker was the wife of Universalist minister, Sylvester Parker. The couple came to Bethel in 1862. Mary and Sylvester, together, kept a diary that Mary continued on her own after Sylvester's death in 1901. Mary was a gifted diarist, clear-eyed, honest and talented. She was also a published poet.

We are hoping to gather more information on Mary Parker from the Lyndonville library, where there is a collection of items from her birth family.

Mary Waller lived in a house she called "Gate-o-the-Hills" on Royalton Hill in Bethel from 1894 to 1906. While in Bethel she wrote her best selling novel, "The Wood Carver of 'Lympus,'" as well as three other novels, and an epic poem, "Our Benny." Our Benny told the tale of William Scott, a young Civil War soldier from Vermont, who had fallen asleep while on sentry duty, and was scheduled to die for that infraction...until Lincoln pardoned him.

By 1931 Mary Waller's "Wood Carver..." had sold more than 100,000 copies in the US, plus thousands more in England and Canada.

Mary Waller we learned was quite publicity shy. Not a lot was ever written about her. There may be more information about this Mary in the estate of J. Wesley Miller in Conway, Massachusetts. We've written to the executor.

Here is the only known picture of Mary Waller.

If anyone has additional information on either of these ladies, we hope you will share it with us.



New Bylaws

With this newsletter you will receive the new proposed Bylaws for the Bethel Historical Society which will be voted on at our meeting on February 6th, 2006. This is the first revision of our Bylaws in thirty years. Attorney Norman Case wrote the original Bylaws in 1976 and he helped us to bring them up to date. We hope to see many of you at the next meeting to vote on our new Bylaws. If you were not at our last meeting and did not get a copy of the old Bylaws, copies will be available before the next meeting for your perusal. We look forward to seeing many of you.



Here is an interesting picture with a notation on back which reads:

But Rogers, Bethel, VT, 1900. Harriet King

We are wondering if this is supposed to be

Bert or Burt Rogers.

Mr. Rogers is driving his donkey cart.

This picture comes from Harriet M. King,

Great grandmother of Sally Truckenbrod.

Sally would like to know if anyone can tell

her more about this gentleman and where

the picture was taken.

Are there any relatives of Mr. Roger out there?

If you can tell us anything about it,

please send info to:

Nick Nikolaidis, 1398 Brink Hill Rd,

Bethel, VT 05032

Bethel Historical Society Report for 2005

The Bethel Historical Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserve, collect and to share the history and artifacts of our town. We appreciate everyone's membership and special donations of time and talent, making this all possible. The Bethel Historical Society's members are people who care about each other, our heritage, traditions and the community of Bethel. Be proud of your membership!

Here are some of the highlights of the past year:

In April we had our 3rd Annual Appraisal Evening with well-known appraiser Jim Marquis. For the first time we joined forces with the Stockbridge Historical Society for this event, which took place at the Stockbridge Elementary School. It was a good fundraiser for both societies.

Also in April, there was a joint meeting with the Bethel Rotary Club, featuring Carroll Ketchum, presenting the History of the White River National Bank, today known as Mascoma Savings Bank. This event was very well attended.

In June the Bethel Historical Society joined together with other towns at the Vermont History Expo 2005 in the special exhibit hall which featured "Structures". Our exhibit was titled: "Plank Wall Houses". Our co-chairs for the exhibit were Don Hyde and Don Brown. Their excellent craftsmanship was evident in the model house they built. It was a very popular display at the Expo and attracted much attention.

During July and August the museum, which is located on the top floor of the Brick Church on Church Street, was open on Sundays. The following docents were on hand to answer questions and talk about their specialties: Don Hyde, Don Brown, Kent Batcheller, Louise and Lorraine Putnam, Rose Leonard, Bill Green, Hilary Mullins, Christopher Constanzo, David Aiken, George and Janet Burnham.

Our society also had a prominent presence at the White River Valley Fall Festival on September 10th. Don Hyde and Don Brown displayed their model plank house on Main Street.

Sandy Levesque and Mary Pavone marched in the parade. They were dressed in period clothing and carried the Bethel Historical Society Banner which advertised the Gilead Historic Walk which took place the following day.

Also in the parade was “yours truly” representing the non-existing “Lilliesville Fire Dept. and Power Squadron.”. This prompted a lot of questions from folks wanting to know where the Department is based.

Sunday, September 11, “The HISTORIC TOUR OF BETHEL GILEAD: 1777 TO THE PRESENT” took place under beautiful sunny skies. Spencer Lewis provided period fiddle music.

The guided tour featured 21 historic sites. Some of the participants were able to travel back in time by wagon. Rick & Bev Wright, who operate the last working dairy farm in Bethel Gilead, each pulled a hay wagon with a tractor, while George and Meryl Buck, of Brookfield, brought their team of rare breed Oberlander horses. The proceeds from this very popular event, which was attended by about 65 people, were donated to the Town Hall Restoration Fund.

In October we met at the Octagon School in East Bethel, where Don Hyde, once again, presented a great slide program and talked about the history of East Bethel.

In November, Lyle Wolfe, the owner of the Greenhurst Inn, graciously invited us for a tour of the Inn. Diane Spambanato talked to us about the history of the inn.

Our December meeting was our second “Christmases Past” program held at the Black Forest Café. Everyone present enjoyed Christmas cookies and refreshments while they shared stories and showed items from Christmases long ago.

With the help of many generous sponsors, we were able to publish our second *historical calendar for the year 2006*. This was our big fundraiser of the year.

Most of our regular meetings are held at the Bethel Public Library. In appreciation the Bethel Historical Society donated \$200 to the library.

The Bethel Historical Society is grateful for the grant of \$500 which was received from the town of Bethel.

Remember the Bethel Historical Society when you are looking for a special gift to give. We have available books, calendars, commemorative envelopes and postcards from past events.

We are proud to announce that we currently have 75 paid members. Looking ahead, we hope to increase our membership and to continue to play a vital role in the preservation of Bethel’s history and artifacts. Our dedicated members continue to “fine tune” the society’s paper collections, inventorying, scanning and identifying the many photos and artifacts in our possession.

We want to preserve what we have and hopefully acquire other important historical items for our collection. Consider the Bethel Historical Society in your legacy.

We are grateful to everyone who has donated time, money and items to our Society and hope you will join us in helping to preserve Bethel’s history.

Welcome our newest members!

Joanne Green Mills

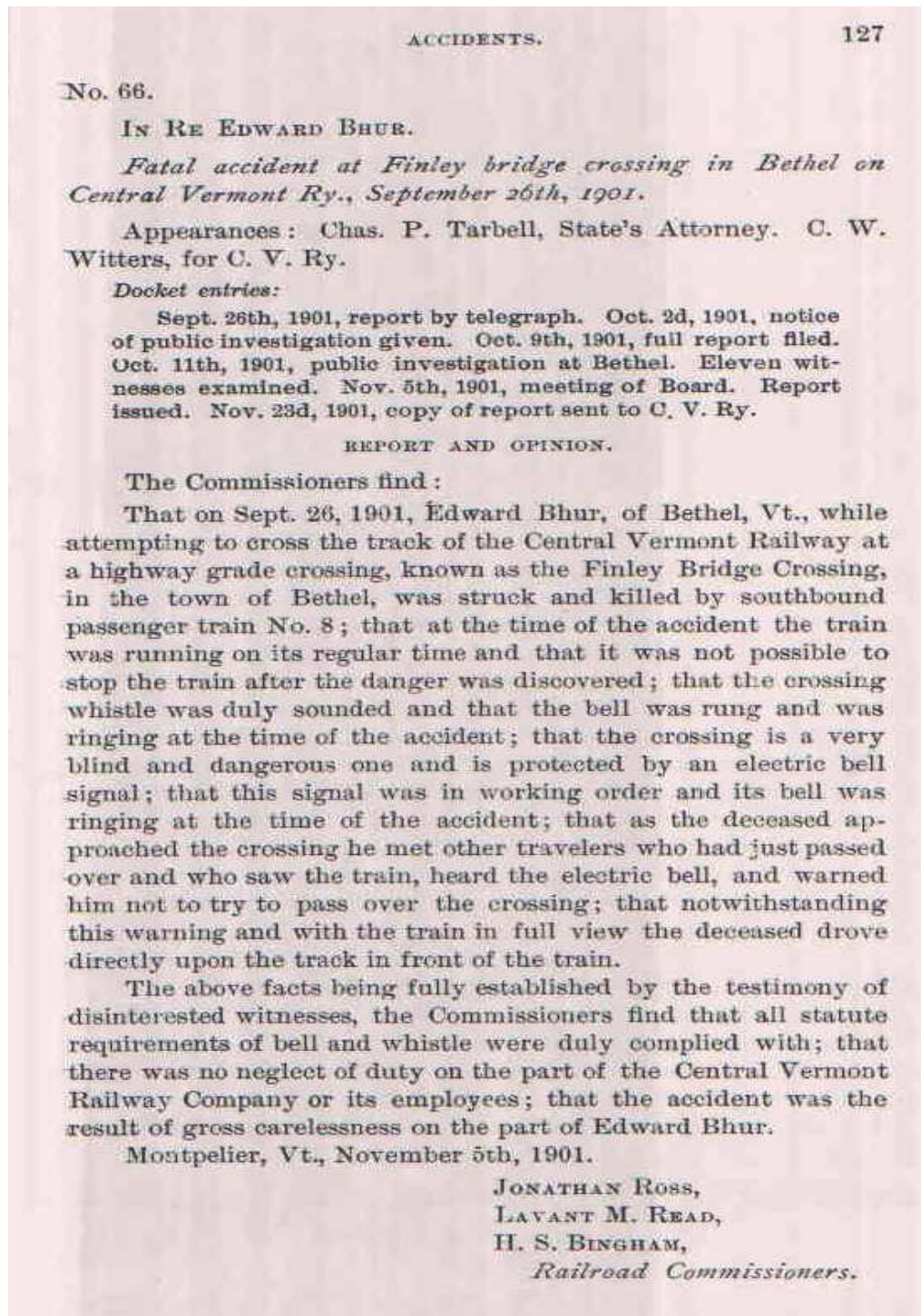
Kevin Flynn



Excerpt From:
Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners of the State of Vermont 1902

Railroad Accident In Bethel, 1901

This is an interesting piece of historical information which gives us some insight into how simple and precise investigations were conducted 100 years ago. Imagine how complicated this investigation would be if it happened today.





BETHEL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bethel Historical Society
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Treasurer: Kent Batcheller

Secretary: Rose Leonard

Curator: Mary Pavone

Program Director: Sandy Levesque:

MAIL TO:

Place First
Class
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Stamp Here



Help Us To Preserve Bethel's History

Bethel History Quiz

This picture shows a Bethel Summer Home. Can you tell us where it is/was?

The first person to send the correct answer will receive an authentic advertising piece from the White River National Bank. Second and third winners will receive a special commemorative envelope from the 90th Anniversary of the White River National Bank.



Our last mystery photo was not identified.

**Please send your answer to: Nick Nikolaidis
1398 Brink Hill RD
Bethel, VT 05032**

**Make sure you include your name and address
In the event of multiple answers, the earliest postmarked entry will win.**