

DECEMBER 2020

# HALIFAX NEWS

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

*Story and Photographs by Andrea Rand, Halifax, Vermont*

If you have ever hiked the wooded trails of Vermont, you probably have come across an old cemetery or two along the way. These abandoned and sometimes rather eerie cemeteries—reminiscent of settings from Stephen King novels—somehow become enticing places to explore. As we pass through the entrance of the now-crumbling stone walls that most often border a cemetery, we are likely to see iron hinges that once supported a wooden gate. We enter these neglected graveyards with a morbid curiosity. We cast our eyes upon the darkened, uneven rows of headstones with their moss-covered, lichen-encrusted, and often illegible inscriptions. We read



Stones lying on the ground in the unrestored Clark Farm cemetery

the epitaphs of the oldest stones warning us of our own fate. Death dates too close to birth dates remind us how tenuous life could be. We feel a sense of sympathy as we gaze upon a whole family of children wiped out by some horrible disease or wonder why infant babes remained nameless when they died. Some of us, though, see beyond the morbid nature of the deaths and look upon these historic burial grounds as an educational opportunity. They offer a wealth of historic, socio-economic, artistic, geologic, archaeologic, genealogical, and religious information that is vulnerable to the ravages of nature and time.

Halifax is home to twenty-two cemeteries, at least four of which are currently in use. Unfortunately, the rest have gone into disuse and deterioration. Pennel Hill and Clark Farm Cemeteries are two of Halifax's earliest cemeteries, where some of our first settlers were laid to rest. They are located in southeastern and south-central Halifax, respectively. Pennel Hill's earliest stone memorializes Elenor English Pennel, wife of Deacon John Pennel. Elenor died in 1770 at the age of 45. Clark Farm Cemetery's earliest stone dates back to 1777 and belonged to Naomi Clark, a two-year-old female child born of Rachel Pennel Clark and Josiah Clark, Sr. (see photo, p. 2).

For the past month, Halifax Cemetery Commissioner Jeff Deforest, Linda Swanson, and I have been visiting all the cemeteries in town to assess their condition. We can see that all are in desperate need of some degree of restoration. Most but not all need tree and limb removal, and broken stones and monuments need



cleaning and repairing. Unfortunately, weathering and time have taken their toll on many of the memorials. Acid rain continues to dissolve and discolor the older marble gravestones, and the freeze/thaw cycle causes the oldest slate stones to separate in layers, obliterating the inscriptions and eventually destroying the stones. Biological growth on the stones also is detrimental to the memorials. Lichen and moss roots imbed themselves into the rock and slowly eat away at the stones.

Foremost, these cemeteries, whether currently in use or long since abandoned, are the resting place of ancestors. For many, it is

important to be able to visit deceased family members, to honor their memory. Visiting reminds us that these ancestors, although gone, are not forgotten. For genealogists, the cemeteries provide information to support or refute written documentation. For the art historian, the folk art of these early stone carvers reflects the evolution of religious thought. The winged effigies of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with their warning epitaphs of our impending doom gave way to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century neo-classical revival of the willow and urn design that symbolized the soul's journey from the earthly to the heavenly realm. Whatever the reason you find yourself drawn to these cemeteries, whether it be idle curiosity or a burning need for intellectual enlightenment, the fact remains: they need to be cleaned up, restored and maintained for future generations.

Fortunately, the outlook for these old cemeteries is not all doom and gloom. To facilitate clean-up, Linda and I are assisting Jeff by visiting each cemetery and listing what needs to be done. To date, some fallen limbs and branches have been removed, overgrown trees have been pruned, vegetation has been brush-hogged, and dead trees are slated for removal. So far, at a few cemeteries, we have washed and straightened some of the leaning stones. In Pennel Hill Cemetery, I have begun to document, photograph, and map the visible stones. In the spring, more work will ensue which will include probing the ground for buried stones, fixing the cracked stones, and erecting toppled monuments.



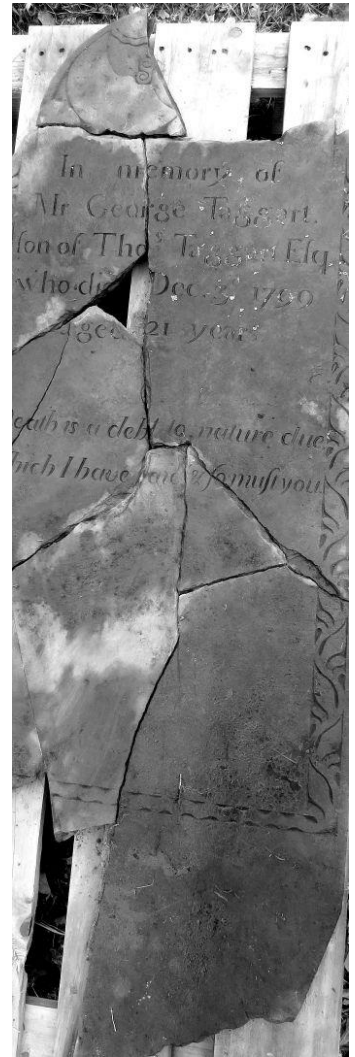
#### Clark Farm Cemetery

One cemetery we have focused on—and where we are currently conducting restorative work—is the Clark Farm Cemetery. This is the oldest public cemetery and is the burying ground of some of the earliest settlers in Halifax. The cemetery is on private property and is no longer in use. Information on the stones indicates that there were six different surnames which include, but may not be limited to, the Clark, Everett, Gaut or Gault, Fish, Pattison and Taggart families. The reason I say “may not be” is that as of mid-November, Linda and I were still probing the area for additional buried gravestones. As I mentioned earlier, the oldest grave marker dates back to 1777, and the last two recorded burials were of Josiah Clark Jr. and Sr. who died in 1813 and 1815, respectively.

#### The History of the Clark Farm Cemetery's Destruction

In 1808 Ebenezer Clark owned the property on which the Clark Farm Cemetery is located. The cemetery was and still is located behind the residence. Ebenezer, for whatever reason, was accused of destroying a public burial ground by running a plough through it and knocking down all of the stones. He was indicted but in 1809 was found innocent of these charges [HHS History Vol. I:512-513]. Even though it is a great story, at this point in time it doesn't really matter who the guilty person was. What matters is that the destruction was complete. For over two hundred years these stones have been lying on the ground. In October when I originally contacted the homeowner, only fourteen stones were visible, lying on the ground and partially exposed, obviously not in their original locations. The exact location for each individual headstone will never be known without conducting an extensive and costly archaeological investigation. As we dig in the area, evidence is surfacing that most stones are near the original area of burial. Recently we discovered the base of a stone still upright in its original position. Most of the headstones are still intact and legible, but others were broken off at the base, and still others have been recently uncovered but are in very bad shape. Once the stones are fixed and re-erected, they will be placed in family groupings in the vicinity where we found them. I have been in contact with the Vermont Old Cemetery Association and Forrest Hicks from Readsboro for guidance as to how to proceed with this particular cemetery and its issues.

The biggest task at hand has been to excavate stones that were partially exposed. Leaving them partially buried in the ground would cause further degradation. Linda and I continue to probe the area, and we have uncovered more head- and footstones that were covered by vegetation, dirt and other headstones. So far, we have uncovered a previously unknown memorial for the Widow Roseanne Pattison, who died April 18, 179-. The stone is badly eroded, and we can infer from the style of the stone that it is from the 1790s, but the last two digits are unclear; they appear to be either 93, 95, or 99. We don't have information in any written documentation as to who she was or to whom she was married. We have also uncovered several individual footstones. These markers were used centuries ago to denote the foot end of the graves. Often these stones have the name or initials of the deceased engraved on them with an encircled pinwheel decoration at the top. We have also excavated about seventy-five percent of the George Taggart stone. Taggart was a young man when he died at the age of 21 in 1799 (photo, right). Prior to excavating and probing only two pieces of his headstone had been exposed.



As winter closes in, the work at Clark Farm Cemetery will be put on hold. Trees that stand in and around that cemetery will be removed this winter. Excavated headstones will be placed on pallets away from the area of the trees that will be harvested, and the stones will be covered with tarps to protect them from snow and ice. In the spring the stones will be repaired and placed back into the area from which they were removed.

There will be a great deal of work involved in fixing the Clark Farm Cemetery and all the other cemeteries in Halifax. When the weather warms, I will be posting more information on Halifax Historical Society and Town of Halifax Facebook pages, looking for people who would like to help with this project. At this point the goal is to restore what remains of these historic cemeteries and protect them for future generations. So, the next time you decide to take a walk off the beaten path and stumble upon an old cemetery, go in and visit. Honor the memories of those who came before us and, though they are gone from this Earthly Realm, help ensure that they will never be forgotten.

A complete list of Halifax Cemeteries appears on page 508, of *Hills and Hollows, Vol. II of the Halifax Town History*.

## TOWN NEWS



### Taraneh Mosadegh

(<https://www.taranehmosadegh.com>) is an Iranian-American artist born in Tehran in 1985 and currently living in Halifax, Vermont. She earned her BFA in painting from Tehran Art University and her MFA from LeRoy E. Hoffberger School of Painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Mosadegh has shown her work in Iran, India, Canada, and the United States and is currently Artist in Residence at Windy Mowing in Halifax, Vermont. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, she presented her

exhibition, *“Memory Of Not Yet,”* a layered depiction of nature, objects and moments of daily life provoked by the artist's environment in Vermont (photo above shows attendees viewing her work in the Halifax Center barn).



The interrelation of concepts such as time, daily rhythms, memory and the everyday vernacular forms a narrative through which Mosadegh reviews the nature of objects in the current moment. Freedom of abstraction assists her in selecting ideas which are usually hidden or less observed. This exhibition was a selection from a group of paintings created during her 2019 – 2020 Windy Mowing artist residency in Halifax. The exhibit may be viewed online at <https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/exhibition/2547970/memory-of-not-yet>.



Taraneh Mosadegh stands beside by the poster for her Halifax exhibit; a few of her paintings are pictured.

### **HISTORY... GLEANED FROM A NOVEMBER 1985 HALIFAX NEWSLETTER.....**

Clocks were unknown to the early settlers, but they had their hour glasses brought from their old hometown, and sundials on their cabin windowsills. There is at least one sundial in Halifax. Years ago, the grand Army owned a hall in West Halifax that they used for their meetings (the hall is now long gone). It was also the meeting place of the Odd Fellows, and once it was the quarters for the "Know Nothings". The Know Nothings were a political party organized in 1852, more correctly known as the "American Party," whose objective was to place in office only those Americans whose ancestry dated from the first comers. Because members feared a foreigner might learn something—anything—about the precepts of their order, they often denied any knowledge at all, hence their nickname. Halifax citizens were firm adherents of this American Party. The only secret order in town at present is the Grange.

### **WILDLIFE INFORMATION TOWN OF HALIFAX**

Prominent rivers and streams flowing through Halifax include the Green River and the East Branch North River. Both streams are major tributaries to the Deerfield River watershed located for the most part in Massachusetts. Numerous smaller but no less important streams and brooks are abundant. The Green River drains the northern portion of the township; the East Branch North River drains the western and southern half. Each watercourse measures approximately six stream miles. Aquatic habitat remains at present in good quality and quantity due to the rural environment of Halifax. Brook trout is the dominant sport fish inhabiting most waters of the town. Stocking of hatchery-produced brookies occurs on an annual basis to supplement natural reproduction. The Green River in Halifax and including Guilford is stocked with 1,000 catchable size brookies, and North Branch receives another 1,000 trout per year. Natural production in the smaller feeder tributaries can be very significant. Brown rainbow trout are infrequently encountered in the lower reaches of the Green River and North Branch. Not only do these small streams provide fishable trout populations, but they may also be an important source of recruitment for receiving waters.

– Written by Edie Fenton in 1985

### **JOAN'S SIGHTINGS.**

I am enjoying all the birds I have. I think I am feeding as much seed as I do in the winter months. I still have a few different kinds of Sparrows. It must be the year of the Blue Jay: Wayne counted 17 out front at the feeders, and I am sure there were a few out back at those feeders as well. I still have my Cardinals, male and female. Some Chickadees, not many Purple Finch, Goldfinch, three different kinds of Woodpeckers. I have a block of suet in a wire basket, and it is funny to see a woodpecker hanging on the bottom pecking suet and a Chickadee or Nuthatch on the top of the same suet cake, pecking away. I am glad to see they share!! Wayne said he saw a

flock of about 50 wild turkey, and just a few days ago I saw a flock of 25 or more. I see there is a good crop of acorn this Fall. That is good because the turkey like to eat them.



**Birdfeeders can help injured birds.** By providing an easily accessible food source, birdfeeders may help injured birds rest and recuperate, according to FeederWatcher.

Send your animal sightings to Joan at [jwcinvt@gmail.com](mailto:jwcinvt@gmail.com)

- Joan Courser

On Hanson Road a pileated woodpecker preceded me up the driveway early one morning – such grand birds they are. Shortly before Thanksgiving, our cat picked out a doe grazing on the edge of the woods. When I opened the window, an unseen buck snorted repeatedly, warning her to flee. It was pleasure to hear. And John photographed a lovely barred owl.

- Laurel Copeland

### FIRE DEPARTMENT NEWS

Oct. 28 four men went to a residence on Wheeler Road for a report of an ill person.

Oct. 29 five men responded to a call on LaRock Lane for an ill person.

Nov. 1 eight men responded to a mutual aid call in Readsboro. One of our trucks ‘covered’ the Readsboro station, and the other men stood by in case they needed more manpower.

Nov. 16 two men went to Thomas Hill for an ill person. Rescue Inc. transported to Brattleboro hospital.

Nov. 22 seven men and one truck responded to a call on Route 112 for a LP gas leak. The lady and her dog were outside when they arrived. That was a good thing because the LP gas meters went very high when the men checked. They cleared out the gas and all seemed to be okay.

**Support our fire department! The firemen still have their monthly 50/50 raffle. Tickets are available by calling Wayne at 368-7733 or any fireman. Tickets are \$ 10.00 a month.**

### SENIOR MEAL

Friday, December 18 is the next meal in West Halifax at the Community Hall located at 20 Brook Road. We serve at noon. The menu will include delicious entree, veggie, roll and dessert. The hall will be set up for a sit-down meal. Take-out will also be available. Please call Joan at 802.368.7733 so she has some idea of how many meals to prepare and how many persons want to eat in.

- Joan Courser

Wishing all a safe and happy holiday season!



Food mouse!



Moon setting over pre-dawn snow



Newsletter  
P O Box 27  
West Halifax VT 05358



Moon on Nov. 3, 2020



Zeber pats the baby beaver belly

# Halifax News

DECEMBER 2020

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