



The Chronicler

Newsletter of the Hartland Historical Society, Inc.
Gaylord House Museum, 141 Center Street, West Hartland

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HartlandHistoricalSociety.com

Spring Edition 2020

Spring Membership Meeting and Presentation Cancelled Due to Coronavirus Safety Measure.

All future events will be postponed until further notice.

Be Safe, Be Healthy, Be Calm

Ransom Family Wedding Dresses Donated. Here is a Glimpse of Early Wedding Traditions

By Terri Atwood

Do you have a distinctive historical wedding dress you would be willing to loan? The Hartland Historical Society would like to invite you to contribute to an upcoming Wedding Dress exhibit with a loan of any distinctive historical wedding dresses from your family. Please contact hartlandhistoricalsociety@gmail.com for more information.

“There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage.”

Martin Luther

“My most brilliant achievement was my ability to be able to persuade my wife to marry me.”

Winston Churchill

Three brides named Charlotte from three generations of the Ransom family from Hartland presents an opportunity to look at how wedding traditions and attire have changed over the years. The Hartland Historical Society has been gifted with three wedding dresses from Eric Jones’ family that span over 100 years of wedding fashion – from 1851, 1920, and 1956. Many of our current wedding traditions developed from daily life as it was hundreds of years ago, and are still in practice, while, as expected, new traditions are born out of new trends, lifestyles, and capabilities.

The “best man” in the wedding party dates back to more medieval times – it once referred to the quality of his swordsmanship; brides were frequently “captured” and the best man would fight off protesting relatives. The honeymoon following the wedding comes from that same period where the newly wedded couple hid from family for a period of time following the forced wedding.

Wedding rings were generally only given to the bride, in the form of simple gold band. Rings for men became popular during World War II as a way to visually connect the couple during long separations.

The timing for the wedding itself has shifted considerably over the last hundreds of years. Many months were specifically avoided; some due to religious beliefs as weddings were frowned upon during February and March (Lent), or May (Feast of the Dead). Practical rural New Englanders would try to avoid marrying between the time of hay and harvest – it would take too much time away from the daily work required to run the farm. The days of the week popular for weddings have also changed. Today most weddings take place on the weekends, to accommodate work schedules. In the past, many weddings took place during the week, in the morning, likely because the clergyman was frequently busy with his regular duties on the weekend.

Most women in the early days of Connecticut received their primary and practical education for what would be their lifelong work as house-

wives in their parent's homes. Little girls would be given simple tasks, and as they grew they would take on increased responsibilities including cooking, cleaning, and child care. Many women used this time to make preparations for their own households, collecting furnishings and handcrafts in anticipation of the day they would marry and have their own home. Quilting bees were a way to help a newly engaged or newly married lady with bedding for the home, providing a social gathering supported by her female friends and family. The "Wedding Ring" pattern is still popular today. The wedding as an "industry" – jewelry, bridal salons, catering, etc., started to take shape between 1920-1950. Bride's Magazine was first published in 1934, and the Marshall Fields department store invented the wedding registry in 1924 to avoid duplication in wedding gifts.

Queen Victoria popularized the tradition of the all-white wedding gown in 1840 at her marriage to Prince Albert. Generally brides did not wear white; the color was too expensive and impractical. Colors such as purple, dark blue, brown, and gold were popular. Many brides would simply wear their "Sunday best", as having a separate dress to wear for just one occasion was very impractical, particularly when many clothes were still hand-made. Even for many years after white wedding gowns became more mainstream, the dress would be dyed and many times remade following the ceremony to allow the owner to wear it more frequently in the future.

Carolyn Butler Abney, a former Hartland resident and an attendee at the wedding of Charlotte Grace Ransom, whose 1956 wedding gown was recently donated to the Hartland Historical Society, took some time to recount her memories from that day. Carolyn was 13 years old at the time, and as the bride's niece, was asked to be a bridesmaid in the wedding, along with a good friend of the bride's, Stacy (last name unknown), and the bride's sister, Florence Ida Walker. She remembers the wedding dress came from Charlotte's grandmother, and believes it was handmade. Carolyn's yellow dress as a bridesmaid was purchased, strapless with a sweetheart neckline, with kitten-heel shoes and made the 13-year-old feel very grown up and elegant. Charlotte was married in the 2nd Congregational Church, and walked down the aisle to a classical piece of music, not the more traditional "here comes the bride" march. Carolyn's entertaining recollection of the music choice came from the bride being concerned about being teased about the rhyme "here comes the bride, big fat and wide" (although Carolyn noted she had a very trim figure). The flowers at the ceremony came from the bride's grandmother's and her Aunt Florence's gardens. A luncheon reception followed the wedding at the church community hall, and the family made tea sandwiches, and other treats to serve to the guests. Charlotte's grandmother made her three layer wedding cake – she called it a "fruitcake" but clarified it was a frosted spice cake. Carolyn was told to take a piece of the wedding cake home and put it under her pillow, and that she'd dream of her future husband. She enjoyed sharing the story of sleeping on her piece of cake, being disappointed not to have dreamed of her future husband, but then enjoying the cake for breakfast. She remembers the bride and groom leaving after the reception on a trip to the Thousand Islands area in New York, and that their car was decorated with tin cans hanging from the back. It was quite an adult experience for a young girl, and she had very fond memories of the day.

Weddings today can range from the simple to the extreme; and bridal gowns from white to every color in the rainbow. The Hartland Historical Society hopes that you'll take some time later this year to visit the museum and see some of the wedding gown history that will be on display.

Yodeling, Windmills and Life

By Heather Desmond and Joanne Groth

Memories from family members Dawn Irwin Shaw, William Foster, and James Foster
with additional information provided by the Hartland Historical Society.

What do yodeling, windmills and romance have to do with Hartland?

It all began, when two families, the Fosters from Old Greenwich, CT and the Irwins from New York, bought summer homes in West Hartland in 1912 and 1917 respectively. Did the families know each other previous to spending time in W. Hartland? We don't know, but what we do know follows.

Mortimer Bristol Foster and Isabelle Jenette Price Foster had their W. Hartland “summer” home, bought in 1912, on the south side of the Second Congregational Church. It was built in 1852 and was named Laurel Heath by Isabelle but was called “The Farm”. They also owned a 13-room house in Old Greenwich, CT. Mortimer was a grandson of Isaac M. Singer, of Singer Sewing Machine. Mortimer & Isabelle’s children were Dorothy, Alice, Edmund “Ned” and William, all born in New York. Their granddaughter Dawn recently told how her mother Alice was a debutante and that as a child her family had nine servants at their mansion in Old Greenwich. The servants lived on the third floor of the home and the chauffer lived above the unattached garage of the estate.

“The Farm” later became their sole residence in the 1930s. In a letter written by their son William, he wrote, “they stocked it eventually with Jersey cows for the richness of their milk. Added to cows were sheep, ducks, chickens, geese, turkeys, a pair of oxen named Ned and Bill, also a team of work horses. In time, when my sisters grew older, they had riding horses. Ned too had a thoroughbred or purebred Shetland pony named Victor, and then came a donkey named Jenny, along with a horse or donkey drawn carriage.

The farm’s land was 666 acres, and many acres were cultivated for pasture and crops as well as silage. Some barns were in the initial purchase and another was added for milking and hay. Before the hay barn was filled with hay, many barn dances were held for the village people. Also the music was supplied by local country musicians. *Photo of Fosters’ home*



To care for the livestock, etc., my father located a family in Stamford, Ct, a Mr. & Mrs. Charles (Karl) and Barbara Goetz who had ten children (ancestry.com) –two girls, Anna & Emma, and 6 sons; Charles, Ed, George, Theo, Adolph, Steve, Fred, and Patrick. Theo, was our chauffer up until about 1933.”

The Goetz family lived in the house owned by Mortimer on the corner of Center and West St at least up until 1923 when Ed and Sara Ransom moved into the house. The Hartland land records indicate that George Goetz bought property from Mortimer in the 1930’s, built the house at 170 Center St and was known as the Goetz farm. His brother Patrick purchased property from the Irwins in 1941 and built the house at 268 Center St. Many of the Goetz family are buried in the West Hartland cemetery. *Photo of Foster/Goetz/Ransom home*



1915 photo of cabin on Foster’s pond

Mortimer & Isabelle’s grandson, Jim Foster, recalls Mortimer had a pond built on their land “Foster’s Pond”. It is located past the cemetery and the brick house on West Street; on the left was the road to the pond, which is now overgrown. On Fosters Pond, they would go sled-ding, fishing, and frogging. Jim remembers how the legs wiggled as his grandmother cooked them. He also remembers how his grandmother always had fresh baked pies in the pantry. Mortimer d. 1957 & Isabelle d. 1961. They are buried in the West Hartland cemetery along with other family members.

The Irwin’s W. Hartland “summer” home according to land records show it was purchased by a Theodore Newman Irwin in 1917. Theodore was young at this time, so speculation is the parents put it in his name. Besides the “summer” home, records indicate that the parents owned over 225 acres of land. Theodore’s parents via ancestry.com were Henry Irwin Jr, and Florence Newman Irwin from Brooklyn, New York. Florence inherited her family’s Department Store (Newman’s) in Brooklyn, NY. Henry and Florence’s children were Theodore N., Henry III, Robert and Charlotte. They were all

born in Brooklyn, NY. The Irwin family never lived permanently in the “summer” home and Theodore sold it to the MDC in 1928 including the house built in 1842, a barn and a water windmill. This property was located past what we know today as the Gaylord House Museum. Both the Foster’s and Irwin’s “summer homes” are no longer in existence. *Photo of Irwin home*



But the story of young love in West Hartland between the Foster girls and Irwin boys is true. Their families owned “summer” homes in West Hartland during the years Theodore & Henry III “Harry” Irwin must have kept company with and courted Dorothy and Alice Foster.

We start with the older brother Theodore Irwin and older sister Dorothy Foster. They married October 1923 at the Old Greenwich home “Green Gables” of Mortimer and Isabelle, according to a newspaper clipping. We know they owned the summer home in W. Hartland until 1928 when they sold it to the MDC. But it is possible that the Irwins continued to summer at this house until the Hamlins started renting year round from MDC in 1935. They also sold 68.7 acres to MDC in 1939 and 5 acres to Pat Goetz in 1941. Theodore and Dorothy Irwin lived and raised 3 boys in Long Island, NY and continued to visit parents Mort & Isabelle Foster in West Hartland and other family members living here year round or with summer homes.

The second romance and marriage was between Harry Irwin & Alice Foster Russell. But first, in 1922 Alice Foster married Eugene Russell of Virginia and had a son in 1923. His name was Mortimer “Mort” Foster Russell. It was shortly after that, that Alice declared Eugene deserted her and filed for divorce. Alice and her son Mort soon moved to W. Hartland and lived in the yellow house (now owned by Ransom, 218 Center Street) next door to the then Ed & Sara Ransom Farm (now owned by Lutz, 9 West Street) and only a few houses down from her parents. The yellow house was willed to Alice in Elizabeth Hitchcock’s will around 1928. Alice sold it to her Aunt Alida May Griffith who sold to Perry Ransom in 1937. Today the house is no longer yellow.



In emails to Stanley Ransom Jr. (Ed Ransom’s grandson) from 2002, Mort wrote: “...lived in the then yellow house just below the stone wall next to your grandfather’s home, where I went to the old one room school, up beyond Osborn’s store, for a couple of years back when I was in second or third grade. I remember your grandmother Ransom well, and used to love her molasses cookies...I believe that her kitchen window faced our home so that the bakery smell was most attractive to my culinary tastes even at the age of 6 or 7!” This would have been around 1929-1931.

When the romance between Harry and Alice actually started is unknown but here is one way they communicated when in W. Hartland. Remember, it is the mid 1920’s and there are no paved roads, electricity or phones. As the story goes, Alice would take the short walk to the Ransom farm water windmill (partly standing today, painted rendition shown here) located at the corner of the West Hartland Cemetery entrance. This windmill pumped water for the Ed & Sara Ransom farm (1923-1961). (The Fosters sold the farm to them in 1933.) Alice would go up on this windmill tower in the evening and yodel down to Harry who was at his family’s home, which also had a water windmill. Maybe, Harry would then climb up that windmill and yodel back. There was over a quarter mile distance between windmills. We don’t know what he or she yodeled but it is fun to ponder.



In a recent interview with Alice and Harry Irwin’s daughter, Dawn Irwin Shaw, she said, “yodeling was kind of strange sounding. I have no idea where or when mother learned how to yodel.” She might have also heard her father yodel back when she was a child. Dawn remembers her mother *cont. pg. 7*

yodeling to her and her siblings, at their family farm in VT, to call them home. (See interesting local info in *What is Yodeling?*)

Alice married her second husband (and fellow yodeler) Henry Irwin III “Harry” on January 31, 1931 in Old Greenwich, CT. After the honeymoon, Harry, Alice and Mort moved to Vermont where 3 children were born; Henry IV (nicknamed: Wink) and twins Diane and Dawn. In 1941 they moved to Durham Center, CT, then onto Long Island (Rockville Center), NY where Harry worked for his mother’s department store (Newman’s). They settled long-term in Virginia to be near their son Mort, who lived in D.C.

The family would visit W. Hartland as often as they could. Dawn attributes her time at Mable Cole’s farm (Wade Cole’s grandmother) the reason she runs a farm in Virginia to this day.

Harry and Alice were married for almost 40 years, when Alice passed away. It seems like a little yodeling might not be bad for romance.

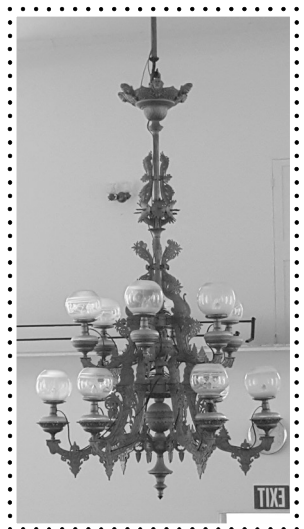
Foster/Irwin family sending Hartland Antique Baby Cradle back home



Dawn Irwin Shaw recalls her mother Alice Foster Irwin telling her she found the baby cradle in the attic in W. Hartland. Which house is the mystery! Was it the house Alice lived in with her son Mort and family owned until 1937 (Dawn born 1933 believes so but does not recall seeing it during her years growing up in VT)? Was it from the Foster/Goetz/Ransom farm owned by the Fosters until 1933 or one of the other Foster/Irwin properties owned up to 1960’s? Dawn remembers her mother using it for her brothers’ four children 1960-1965 and her daughter Susan 1966. She kept the cradle and has just passed it on to her cousin Jim Foster who will be returning it to W. Hartland as a donation for the Historical Society Gaylord House Museum.

What is Yodeling?

If you are interested, there is a book entitled: *Yodeling and Meaning in American Music* by Timothy Wise Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016. Or if you prefer a shorter version there is a book review found in the *Journal of the Society for American Music* (2019) Volume 13, Number 1 pp. 114 by Allison McCracken. A. McCracken writes: “The common definition of yodeling, for the layperson, is that it is a sound made to indicate the crack or break in the voice as the singer shifts between vocal registers, from chest to head/falsetto voice or, in the case of sopranos (who are already in head voice), from head to ‘whistle’ voice.” Here are some more interesting details from her writing: “According to Wise’s extensively researched, certainly definitive study, yodeling has been around since the eighteenth century and has been practiced across classes, genres, sexes, regions and ethnic and racial groups. Yodel sounds and themes have been present in folk, classical, art and popular commercial music. A broad range of singers have incorporated the yodel. In the nineteenth-century United States, yodeling performers included popular opera star Jenny Lind, the influential Hutchinson Family and, inevitably, blackface minstrels.” A special nod to the First Church in Hartland, as they have an original *Jenny Lind* chandelier in their sanctuary. *Photo taken 2019*





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The Hartland Historical Society's mission is to discover, procure and preserve whatever historical facts may be available relating to the civil, military, literary, cultural, and ecclesiastical history of the town of Hartland; and to investigate and preserve such traditions and knowledge as now exist only in the memory of persons. The Society will be responsible for sponsoring and exhibiting the collection of historical articles, pictures and other items relating to the town.

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In This Issue

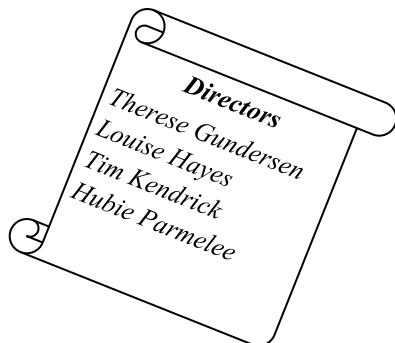
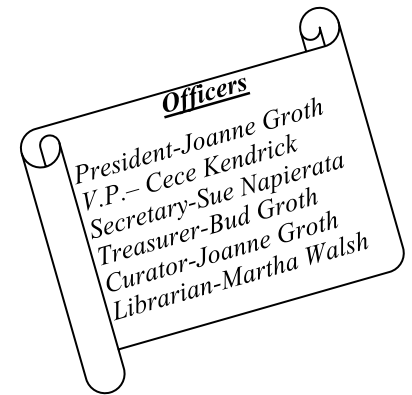
A glimpse of early wedding traditions.
Ransom family wedding dresses donated.

Yodeling, Windmills, Life and Romance

What is Yodeling?

Baby Cradle donation coming soon

Tribute to Joan, Wade, Thelma and Grace



Mark your 2020 Calendars

- ◆ Gaylord House Open, 1st Sunday of each month 2-4pm by appointment
- ◆ Blueberry Picnic Aug. 9, 12pm
- ◆ Fall Meeting W.H. Library, Oct. 4, 2-4pm
- ◆ Santa Breakfast, E.H. Fire House December 12, 8:00 am—11am