

# BULLETIN



Number 119

Orleans County Historical Society, Inc. • Brownington, Vermont 05860

Spring 2010

## Runaway Pond — the first man-made ecological disaster in the New World

Two hundred years ago, on June 6, 1810, the early settlers of Glover and Sheffield accidentally let out a large body of water known as Long Pond. The lake spanned the border between Glover and Greensboro, and was a mile and a half long, a half mile wide, and over 100 feet deep. Two billion gallons of water rushed north through the Barton River valley like a tsunami, knocking down the forest, pushing boulders for miles, and laying down a thick trail of mud, sand and debris over the land. The flood took out every bridge and every mill along the way, and reached Lake Memphremagog, 25 miles away, in about six hours, raising the level of the 35 mile long lake by a foot. For years afterwards people set fires to clear away the piles of tangled timbers dropped by the flood. Ultimately, after the mud settled, the farmers, who at first were furious because their crops were ruined, found that their land was leveled out and improved, and a firm, cleared trail was laid north.

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the catastrophic event, now referred to as Runaway Pond, will be celebrated in Glover on June 4, 5, and 6 with a variety of activities, including walking tours of the basin, graveyard ghosts, a quilt show, concert, running race, parade, and a ceremony on June 6 with the governor in attendance. Details about the schedule can be found at [www.gloverhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.gloverhistoricalsociety.org)

That eventful day in 1810, began early in the morning, when 60 men and boys from the surrounding settlements of Keene Corners and the Parker Settlement in Glover and also Sheffield Village, as well as a man from Barton and a man from Wheelock, converged in the wilderness, blowing tin horns to locate each other. They began to dig a trench to connect Mud Pond, which flowed north as the headwaters of the Barton River, with Long Pond, which flowed south as the headwaters of the Lamoille River. They planned to divert just a little of the water of Long Pond to increase the flow of

the Barton River, which was very low after two years of drought. The project was the brilliant idea of Aaron Willson, an experienced canal and bridge builder from Keene, N.H., who owned the grist mill and sawmill on the Barton River, near where Green Mountain Fence Company in Glover is now located. They hadn't counted on the unstable flour-fine sand covered with just a 2 to 3 inch limestone crust, described as "frozen gravel", which was all that held back the north end of Long Pond.

The letting out of Long Pond, said to be the first man-made ecological disaster in the New World, occurred very early in the settlement history of Orleans County. Most people lived on high ground near the early roads, and therefore no human lives were lost, but there were some very narrow escapes. Sheep and cattle grazing on farms along the river were washed away. After the pond emptied, witnesses recalled that the mud left was covered with dying fish and broken eggs from water bird nests, and all along the Barton River Valley was the stench of dead fish.

The September 1810 edition of the Whitelaw Map notes, "This pond was the source of the LaMoelle till June 6, 1810 when it broke its northern bound and run entirely out, and nothing remains but a small brook running north." The map shows the early roads, including the first road through the county from Greensboro to Derby built by Timothy Hinman in the 1790's, which was the route followed by many of the early settlers to their new home.

Numbers have been placed on the map to show where events occurred on that fateful day along the path of the flood. We are indebted for our information to the late Wayne Alexander, who compiled the many varied accounts into a book "Runaway Pond, the Complete Story," first published in 2001, and now reprinted for the celebration.

The sites of the early settlements where the diggers

*continued on page 3*

# Schedule of events

## **Museum Opens for the Season – Sat., May 15, through Fri., Oct 15**

Guided tours of the Old Stone House are available Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Members free, Orleans County residents and AAA members \$5, other adults \$6, Students \$3, Children under 5 free.

## **Blacksmith Shop Hammer-In and Grand Opening – Sat. May 22, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Come see local blacksmiths at work in our new blacksmith shop on International Blacksmith Day. We are planning a series of Blacksmithing Courses during the summer. Come meet the instructors and see this new teaching space.

## **Runaway Pond Bicentennial in Glover – June 3, 4, 5, and 6**

Schedule of events at [www.gloverhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.gloverhistoricalsociety.org) and in the papers. Ceremony Sunday at Runaway Pond Park at 1 p.m.

## **Volunteer Tea and Annual Meeting – Tuesday, June 8, 3 to 5:30 p.m.**

We welcome volunteers both old and new for another busy season at the museum. Bill Hosely will present a program on *Reading Places: Art, Architecture & Gravestones in Early Vermont*. The program will be followed by a brief annual meeting of the Orleans County Historical Society, reviewing 2009 and electing new board members.

## **Antique Engine Show–Saturday, June 19, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

Members of the Antique Gas and Steam Engine Association bring their beloved old one lungers and fire them up on the museum grounds. The clatter of old engines and the chatter of old friends make this one of the museum's most popular and unique events. The engine show is free. Museum tours are available for the usual fee.

## **Big Band Dance – Sat., July 10, 8 – 11 p.m.**

The Swing North Big Band will be playing for our 5<sup>th</sup> annual Benefit Dance at the beautifully restored, acoustically excellent Irasburg Town Hall. This rare opportunity to hear the big band sound of yesteryear honors veterans of all wars by recognizing those at the dance, and listing the names of those who enlisted from every town in the county in the downstairs exhibit, where bountiful refreshments are provided. The dance benefits programs at the museum. \$25 per couple, or \$15 individual admission.

## **North Country Poetry Reading – Sunday, July 18, 2 pm.**

Northern Vermont poets, including Galway Kinnell, David Budbill, Jody Gladding, Burt Porter, and Lindsay Knowlton will read from their own work, and also poems by the late Hayden Carruth and James Hayford, at the Samuel Read Hall House. Admission by donation. Refreshments will be served.

## **Summer Classes – June through August**

Check our website at [www.oldstonehousemuseum.org](http://www.oldstonehousemuseum.org) for listings, and watch for the schedule in the mail. Classes will include Mother's Doughnuts, Botanical Illustration, Blacksmithing, Pond Design, Home Brewing, and more....

## **Time Travelers Day Camp – July 26 – 30, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

This year's theme is Mr. Hinman's Road. Campers age 8 – 12 will learn about the early settlers, and practice woodworking, blacksmithing, pottery, hearth skills and animal husbandry. Call for a brochure.

## **Old Stone House Day – August 15, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Our biggest event of the year, with museum open house, demonstrations of traditional skills, crafts, farmers market, childrens activities, music, and food.

## **Old Stone House Antique Roadshow – August 25, 7 p.m.**

Antique appraiser Jim Marquis will be at the Grange Hall in Brownington Village to appraise items on Wednesday evening. Appraisals cost \$10 per item, or three items for \$25. No jewelry. Refreshments will be served. Please register in advance by phoning 754-2022 or e-mailing [director@oldstonehousemuseum.org](mailto:director@oldstonehousemuseum.org).

## **Fall Foliage Run & Bike – September 12**

On Sunday morning a half marathon, 5K run & walk, as well as a bicycle race will start and finish in front of the Old Stone House. Refreshments, T-Shirts and Prizes. Check our website for details. Pre-register by calling 754-2022.

(continued from pg. 1)

came from are shown: P – Parker Settlement, K – Keene Corners, S – Sheffield Village, B – Barton Village, W – Wheelock

1. Around 8 a.m. the men began to dig a trench about 1200 feet long, 4 feet deep, and 6-8 feet wide. At noon they broke for lunch and fishing. They resumed digging at 1 p.m., and broke through the crust, releasing the water. They had stepped back, celebrating their success with a drink of whiskey, when the water in the ditch disappeared, a noise like thunder was heard, and the ground where they stood began to give way. The torrent carved out a deep, wide gully through the knoll that separated Long Pond from Mud Pond, and pushed its water out ahead. When it was all over Mud Pond was half its original size. A tree can still be seen sticking out of the water, embedded there by the flood. Thirteen years after the flood twenty trees could be seen.

2. Aaron Willson's Mill. His wife, or maybe his daughter, was left grinding grain for a customer who had tied his horse to a post. Spencer Chamberlin, or some say Solomon Dorr, raced ahead of the flood to rescue her. He pulled her to safety just in time, and the customer scrambled up the bank, but the horse was swept away.

3. The site of Glover Village was a cedar swamp before the flood. The receding waters covered it with a thick layer of sand and gravel, and also deposited a 100 ton boulder from a half mile away, which was later cut up for the foundation stones of the Universalist Church.

4. Near where the fairgrounds are now was a dense swamp, with a log cabin on higher ground in the center. At

3 p.m. the water spread out over the wide area about 12 feet high, but an elm tree beside the cabin caught the timbers and blocked the current. The water rose to the eaves of the house, lifting a table with a pan of milk to the ceiling, and then gently lowering it down without a drop of milk spilt. The wide valley allowed the water to spread out and slow down, dropping timbers and sand and mud. Even now people who excavate in the area run into buried logs.



5. Mr. Blodgett's saw-mill, a mile north of Barton Village, now called High Bridge Hill, was swept away. He brought a \$1,000 suit on the diggers, but settled for \$300.

6. Enos Mill, near where the Orleans Municipal Building stands now, was washed away and a 100 ton boulder was moved several rods.

7. Barton Landing, where the Barton River and Willoughby River converge on the River Road in Orleans, had been a deep water access to Lake Memphremagog, where a three ton barge of potash could begin its journey to the markets of Montreal. The flood dropped boulders, mud and logs into the channel, plugging that waterway for freight.

8. In Coventry Hannah Parker (later Proctor) was crossing a bridge on horseback, and sped up when she heard a loud roar. The bridge and causeway behind her were washed away by the flood.

9. The water of Long Pond arrived at Lake Memphremagog ½ hour after sunset.

10. Edmund Miles, who was boiling salts on the shores of Lake Memphremagog near Georgeville, Quebec came back the next morning and was amazed to find that the lake had risen a foot, though there had been no rain.

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# Time Travelers Day Camp – “Mr. Hinman’s road”

Time Travelers’ Day Camp, the museum’s annual history-based camp for children aged 8 through 12, will take place during the last week of July, from Monday the 26<sup>th</sup> through Friday the 30<sup>th</sup>, from 9 am to 3 pm.

The theme for 2010 is “Mr. Hinman’s Road.” Campers will walk in the footsteps of Timothy Hinman and the first settlers of Orleans County, who traveled north on his new track through the forest.

Begun in 1791, Hinman’s road parted company with the Bailey Hazen military road at Greensboro and headed northeast to Derby, passing through Brownington on its way. Timothy Hinman had been a member of the group of men who surveyed Northern Vermont after it became a part of the United States. He bought land in Derby, but had to build a road to get to it. He brought his family up from Connecticut to Greensboro, which was on the existing Bailey Hazen Road, and as close as he could get to Derby by road at that time. Over a period of years he forged a road through the wilderness, and finally was able to take his family to their land on Derby Pond. He continued building his road into Canada.

Campers this year will explore a section of the Hinman Road, and other ancient roads in Brownington, looking for cellar holes, stone walls, and old trees, searching for traces of history.

Some of the skills that settlers carried with them and relied on for survival will be taught, along with some skills they learned from their new Abenaki neighbors. Wood Craft, Sheep to Shuttle, Blacksmithing, Hearth and the Potter’s Trade will be offered by expert local artisans and teachers. A few special visitors will step out of history to engage the children, making Timothy Hinman’s time come alive with performances of music and story telling. The much anticipated traditional potluck family picnic will finish up the week.

To learn more, request a Time Travelers’ Camp flyer by calling the museum at (802)754-2022 or e-mailing [education@oldstonehousemuseum.org](mailto:education@oldstonehousemuseum.org). Camp is limited to 50 children, and choices for activities are given preference on a first come basis, so get your registration in early.

# Volunteer Tea and Annual Meeting June 8

This year we have decided to combine the annual Volunteer Tea with our Annual Meeting, with the goal of including the Orleans County Historical Society’s most active members—our volunteers—in reviewing the past year and electing new board members.

On Tuesday, June 8, beginning at 3 p.m., we will gather at the Hall House for tea and refreshments, recognition of the Volunteer of the Year, an interesting historical program, and then a very brief annual meeting.

We have enlisted William Hosely, scholar, writer and public speaker, and a leading expert on New England art and history to present his program, *Reading Places: Art, Architecture & Gravestones in Early Vermont*. It will be funded through a grant from the Vermont Humanities Council Speakers Bureau, which describes it as follows: “In developing their towns, early Vermont settlers created a wide range of things that spoke to their values, backgrounds, skills and cultural attitudes—architecture, gravestones, furniture, ironwork, paintings, pottery, and textiles. The lecture and slide presentation demonstrate how art and artifacts can be used to understand historical experience, while surveying the visual allure of historic Vermont.” We will provide artifacts from our own collection to further illustrate Mr. Hosely’s points.

All Orleans County Historical Society members and people interested becoming volunteers at the museum are welcome to attend. There are a variety of interesting volunteer opportunities at the museum. We always need docents who can commit to an afternoon a week, or every couple of weeks, to give tours of the museum and barn. During our school field days volunteers present traditional skills, help children plant the garden, and help register visiting schools. We need at least 30 volunteer judges for the History Fair. Many volunteers man the rooms in the museum on Old Stone House Day so that visitors can wander around at their own pace. We need volunteers to help us maintain the gardens on the museum grounds. And volunteers help catalogue and care for the collection, and also help us get our bulk mailings out.

The museum could not function without our wonderful volunteers. We try to keep it fun and interesting. So join a nice group of people at the Volunteer Tea and Annual Meeting and get involved. The program promises to be fascinating, the food will be tasty, and we’ll keep the annual meeting at the end short.

# Archival addition to the Twilight House to be built this summer

The Old Stone House Museum has an extensive collection of historical photographs, negatives, glass negatives, prints, postcards, journals, diaries and manuscripts as well as a collection of rare books. In planning the direction of the museum in the next five years, the staff and the board of directors have realized that we need a more environmentally secure place for these irreplaceable artifacts. Although the interior climate of our storage in the Eaton House is not terrible, it could be very much improved. The main concern is fire and theft. The problem of fire cannot be solved at reasonable cost by putting an archival storage area in an existing building.

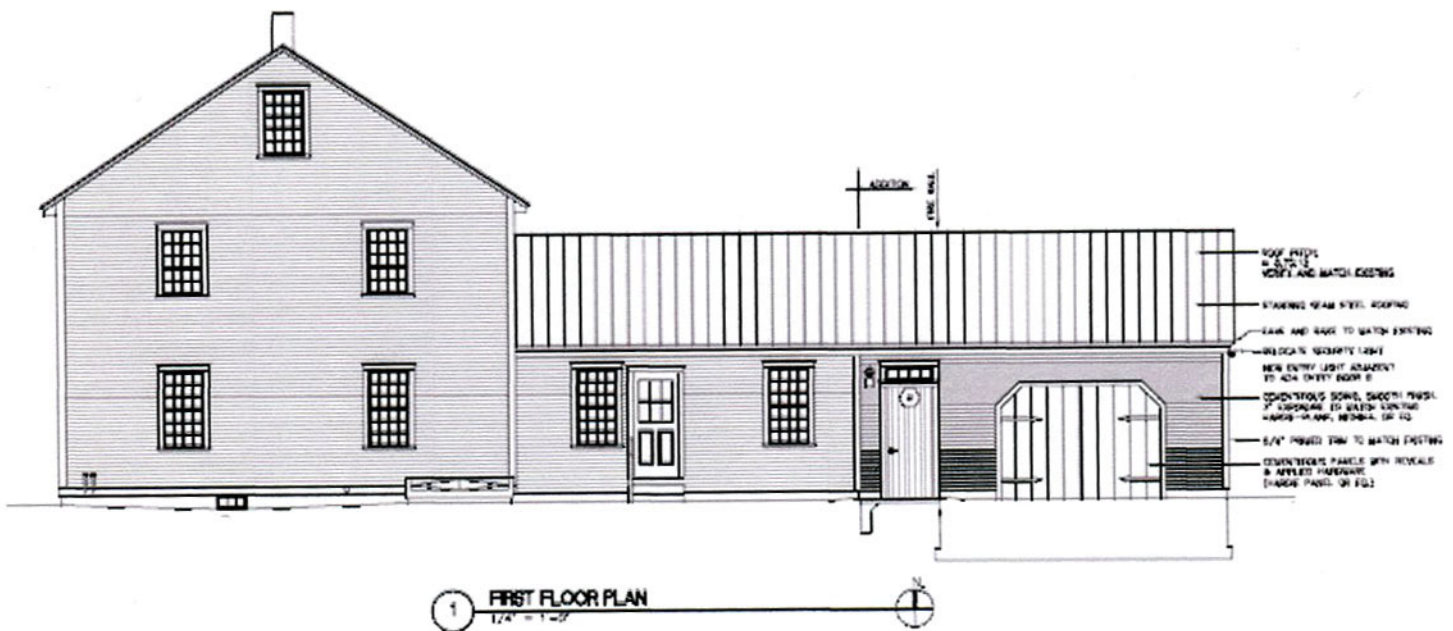
There are old photos and an architectural drawing of a simple but beautiful carriage shed that extended ninety feet from the back of the Twilight House where our office, museum store and visitor center are located.

We are in the process of designing a small structure that would have an exterior treatment replicating the old carriage shed that had been attached to the Twilight House 100 years ago. The new building with a firewall hidden inside would be about 18 feet by 23 feet long. Its construction would be of fire proof and fire resistant

materials: cement floor, steel studs, high density cellulose insulation, gypsum walls, cement clapboard and metal roofing. It will be environmentally sound, cost effective in its energy use, with an efficient in climate control system. The Shelburne Museum's head conservationist, Rick Kerschner, has volunteered to consult with us on this project. This concept has been preliminarily approved by Judith Erlich of the State Division of Historic Preservation as an appropriate structure using a historic footprint and documented images.

The value of place-based history is having historical artifacts easily available for study and use to the community that created them. Some generous donors have already contributed to this important project but more funding is needed from interested patrons. We continue to write grants to help with this new building, although they have become extremely competitive in this particular economy.

If you'd like to help us preserve our irreplaceable collection of documents and images in the new climate controlled archival addition we'd appreciate your donation of any amount. Specify "archival addition" on your check.



**Orleans County Historical Society, Inc.**

Old Stone House Museum  
109 Old Stone House Road  
Brownington, VT 05860

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## Book of Orleans County photos to be published

Last fall, the Old Stone House Museum was approached by Arcadia Publishing, the nation's largest local history publisher, asking if we were interested in creating a book about Orleans County. Arcadia has published books on Newport, Derby Line, and Holland, but Orleans County as a whole had not been done yet. Upon deliberation, the Museum staff decided that it would be an excellent project.

The book is being researched and written by Sarah Dumas, the Museum's librarian and web person, and edited by Elizabeth Nelson, the Museum's collections manager. It will contain old photographs from the 18 towns in Orleans County, including the villages within the towns. Look for "Orleans County" in local bookstores by spring 2011.

### **THE OLD STONE HOUSE MUSEUM BULLETIN**

The Orleans County Historical Society, Inc.  
109 Old Stone House Road, Brownington, VT 05860  
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