



# Members Quarterly Newsletter

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Pittsfield Historical Society  
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Pittsfield, New Hampshire – The Gem of the Suncook Valley  
Liz Dimmick & Bill Provencal, co-editors

The following article was written by Mary Pat Christakos after an interview with Larry Berkson and published by the *Pittsfield Post* on July 29, 2020. Mary Pat and her husband recently moved to Pittsfield in 2019. I believe it is an excellent tribute to all of you who have supported the Pittsfield Historical Society through the years and who continue to support the Society's recent endeavors.

## Pittsfield Historical Society Bringing the Past to Life

When you take a casual stroll through the quiet streets of downtown Pittsfield, it's hard to imagine the hustle and bustle that once defined our town as one of the most important and vibrant centers of commerce and culture in the region.

We met recently with Larry Berkson of the Pittsfield Historical Society and he generously opened the windows to the amazing history of Pittsfield and some of the town's inspiring founders and leaders. Larry has had a lifelong interest in history and genealogy. He was born in Pittsfield, left the area for the Midwest to pursue college, eventually earning a PhD in Political Science and Public Law from the University of Wisconsin. After returning to Pittsfield, Larry was approached by a small group of volunteers who asked him to help revive the Historical Society.

The Society subsequently purchased their current headquarters, the building on Elm Street, and were able to move a large number of donated artifacts into their new "home." Shortly thereafter the all-volunteer members of the Society set forth on a number of major projects. The first was sponsoring Lyman Park and establishing the site as the starting point for what later became the Pittsfield Historic Trail, a fascinating 1.5 mile walking tour highlighting 35 historic buildings and locations, with an accompanying brochure that provides interesting details about the early people and places of our town.

Larry explained how the period after the Civil War brought significant growth to Pittsfield, and the arrival of the railroad (The Blueberry Express) in 1869 set the stage for an economic boom that endured for close to 100 years.



Pittsfield was the largest town serving the region including Barnstead, Chichester, Epsom and Northwood. The town had numerous schools, churches, a beautiful library, a theater, and at one time, an opera house, all of which contributed to a rich cultural heritage. In the post WWII era there were over 100 businesses in town, 4 car dealerships, 9 gas service stations, a bowling alley, a few hotels and 4 grocery stores.

Over the years, the Society has completed many projects including the development of the Thyng Memorial next to Floral Park Cemetery. They found the original bell from the cotton mill bell tower and returned the bell to its current resting place on Main Street; and they found the original steam pump from the cotton mill and arranged for it to be restored and placed in front of where the cotton mill once stood, across from the dam.

The Society has hosted numerous programs and lectures and completed significant research on what they call The Pittsfield Hall of Fame. This includes about 50 people from our town who achieved significant accomplishments in a range of fields, including the CEO and Chairman of Gulf Oil, the first female bank president, the founder of the California public school system, a Minnesota Supreme Court justice, NH governors and senators, and a renowned WWII pilot ace, among other notables.

The members of the Society have also been thoughtful curators and caretakers of thousands of artifacts. Their collection is exceptionally large, including manuscripts, every issue of the original *Suncook Valley Times* newspaper first published in 1868, photos, portraits, prints, maps, items related to the railroad, the history of the fire department, objects related to the cotton mill, weaving and shoe manufacturing industries, furniture, household items, farm equipment, and so much more. A few of the most historic and interesting items include John Cram's Bible (the "Father of Pittsfield," circa 1768); a black beaver-skin top hat that belonged to one of John Cram's sons, Tristram Cram (1770 to 1838); the original ticket machine from the old railroad depot that still has paper tickets on the reels inside the machine; and a spectacular Shaker spinning wheel.

Although the Society is steeped in the past they are now looking forward to moving into their new building in the future. They are pleased with the construction progress to date and have begun early planning for moving their archives and trove of objects to the new building, as well as planning new exhibition spaces. The Pittsfield Historical Society operates entirely on donations and with several of their traditional fund-raising activities having been cancelled due to the pandemic, they are extremely grateful for community support. Please consider becoming a member or making a donation: the address is Pittsfield Historical Society, 13 Elm Street, Pittsfield, NH 03263.

Although Larry Berkson wears his title of Town Historian with tremendous humility, he is without doubt the expert regarding the history of this very special place. Thank you Larry and all of the Society members for your tireless devotion to preserving our magnificent past and for inspiring all of us for a bright future.



## Pittsfield Historical Society's 2021 Calendar On Sale Now!



Grist mill and store at the foot of Concord Hill, built by William B. Hartwell

**Purchase your copy at  
the Town Hall, Josiah  
Carpenter Library, or the  
Historical Society Museum!**

*The theme for our 2021 Calendar is:*

### **"Before and After"**

with 28 pictures of older buildings and how they have changed over time.

**Cost: \$15**

Call or Text Fuzz: 603-848-4488



Current building was purchased by Joseph Cortese for his stamp operation called "Noble Spirit."

The calendars can also be mailed to you for an additional \$1.80. These make great gifts!

### **Honor Someone Special!**

### **Buy A Commemorative Brick!**

A commemorative garden is being created on the grounds of the new museum. "BUY-A-BRICK" to honor whomever you wish, including yourself, your family, friends, business, or event. The bricks cost \$100 each and may be engraved with 3 lines of 18 characters each for a 4"x8" brick purchase. A commemorative certificate is also available for an additional \$15.



## Accessions

During the past few weeks, many people have donated valuable and different types of items to the museum. Unfortunately, there isn't enough space to acknowledge all of them in this issue of the newsletter. Items not mentioned in this newsletter will be acknowledged in future issues.

### Scenic Theater, Depot Street

The Entertainment Display area in the museum received some interesting and descriptive items from the Scenic Theater. The Scenic Theater, now home of the Pittsfield Players, was opened in 1914 as a movie theater. It was sold in 1925, renamed Liberty Theater, and sold again in 1937. At that time, it was renamed Scenic Theater.

When the Scenic closed in 1991, the Pittsfield Players bought the building for its permanent and current home. Previously to this time, the Pittsfield Players converted the movie theater for a short period of time to produce their plays. Now they had a home!

Thanks to Susan Leclerc, we now have some posters advertising the movies *Down on the Farm* with Jed Prouty and *SUEZ* with Tyrone Powers and Loretta Young, both released in 1938.



Paula Gilman and Thomas Dombrowski also donated some Scenic Theater weekly ads highlighting the various movies shown during a week. According to these ads, movies didn't have an extended play at the theater. They were shown for one day and then were gone! The dates on these range from 1941 to 1944.



## Balloon Rally Quilt

Thanks also to Susan Leclerc for donating a hand-made quilt featuring various and colorful hot air balloons. This quilt was made by members of the Circle of Home and Family



### Milk and Cream Bottles and Pliers

Although milk and cream bottles and side-lasting pliers aren't used together, both were recently given to the Society by Corine and Leon Miller. They donated a quart milk bottle and a pint cream bottle from L.E. Kimball Dairy. L. E. Kimball Dairy was owned by Corine's father.



The Millers also donated a pair of side-lasting pliers from the shoe factory on Joy Street. Interesting story on how the pliers were used. If you have a chance, ask Leon!



**Update on the new Museum!**



**Main Street side of the building.  
A new sign!**

**Dave Harper working on interior trim.**

**Thanks, Dave!**



**Larry Berkson and Ray Webber  
assembling the ramp. Good Work!**

**Thanks to Everyone for helping  
with this new building!**



**Joe Darrah with the saw and crew trimming trees.  
Looks Great!**