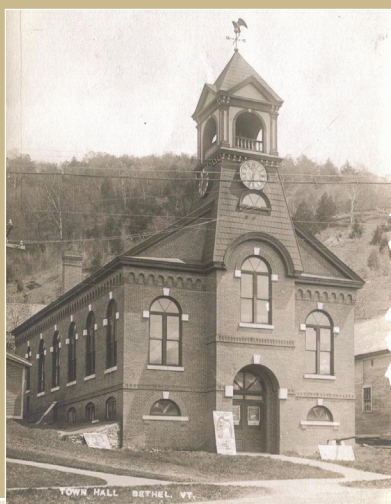


HISTORICAL BETHEL SOCIETY

News from the Society • October 2021



We review the past,
not in order that we may
return to it,
but that we find in what
direction, straight and clear,
it points to the future.

In Memoriam

SUSAN FEDAK

It is with a heavy heart that we share the loss of our dear friend and dedicated volunteer, Susan Fedak.



Sue was a passionate supporter of the arts, the historical society, and our greater Bethel community.

(Continued on Page 2)



Pictured from left are Bethel operators Loraine Putnam, Ellen Grassetto, Anne Lawson, Elloweene Flint, and Brownie Rix. Photo courtesy of Mary Floyd.

Bethel Calling, Please Hold

By Mary Floyd

In 1894, Carl D. Cushing, as owner of Bethel Mills, built a telephone line connecting his house with the mill, and to the residence of Mrs. Mary Harrington on River Street. This was the first independent company line in Bethel. There were previously two or three telephones in the area as part of the Bell System, which ran through a section of the valley.

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE TELEPHONE

This independent line was gradually extended by Cushing, taking in other homes and businesses.

In May 1902, connections had been made with the farms of R.E. Burnett, Honorable R.J. Flint, Mary Waller, G.H. Kimball, house and store.

In 1904, Cushing with B.G. Bundy built a line to Camp Brook and across the hills through Lympus to Stockbridge and Gilead. A telephone coming into the home was a major

(Continued on Page 3)



DO YOU HAVE A WITCH WINDOW?

By JoAnn Marshall

I always like seeing the oddly angled windows in some of the older homes in Vermont. If you drive around New England, you may have seen a few



Photo by JoAnn Marshall.


of them. In Bethel, I have seen a few of them, and there are probably a few that I have not noticed. They are always in the upstairs, in the gable end of homes.

Dad always called them "witch windows." I asked him why they were called that, and his response was, "A witch cannot fly through a window at that angle on their stick." For a while I used to fear going to sleep, as we did

not have one of these windows.

Still, years later, I think about the reason for these windows to be at such an odd angle. I have also heard them called "coffin windows"; it was said that it was easier to take a coffin through these windows than to carry it down the stairs. One would think it would be much easier to carry the body down the steps, and then put the body in the coffin. Personally, I believe the windows were placed at an angle where a normal window would not fit to put air and light into the room that it was in.

I guess there will always be a bit of mystery about these windows ...

Let us know if you have one. We would love to take a picture to keep in a book in the Bethel Historical Society museum. 

Early Years of the Telephone

(Continued from Page 1)

event, allowing doctors to be more quickly contacted, compared to the matter of hours it had previously taken. The party line often contained 25 to 30 subscribers, causing complications from "listeners in" and having receivers down when trying to get a call through. This early rural development was known as the Farmers' Telephone Company.

In 1906 it was incorporated as the Bethel Telephone Company. Increasing patronage made it necessary to move the switchboard out of the Bethel Mills building to an office in the second story of the bank building. Business gradually increased during the next ten years. Free connecting service was made available with the Orange County Telephone Company, the Randolph exchange, the Strafford Telephone Company, and the Norwich Telephone Company.


By 1909, the company had a call list of 275 names. A new switchboard was received and installed. In 1916, Cushing purchased a South Royalton

BETHEL BECAME ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TELEPHONE CENTERS AMONG THE SMALLER TOWNS IN THE STATE.

company, taking in the territory of Chelsea, Washington, Tunbridge, Sharon, West Hartford, and South Royalton. The main exchange remained in Bethel, with exchanges installed in South Royalton and Rochester. Bethel became one of the most important telephone centers among the smaller towns in the state. Towns covered by the consolidation included Granville and Hancock, Rochester, Stockbridge, Strafford, Pittsfield, Bethel, Barnard, Pomfret, part of Woodstock, Hartford, Chelsea,

Washington, Tunbridge, Royalton, Strafford, part of Brookfield and part of Randolph. The name of the company was changed to the White River Valley Telephone Company.

Following the burning of the Shedd house on Main Street in 1921, the company purchased the site and built the telephone building, 24 x 34 feet, consisting of a basement for storage and work, a ground floor divided into a switchboard room, rest room, private office, and general office. The outer walls were covered with white stucco and the roof topped with green fireproof shingles.

The *Bethel Courier*, May 4, 1922, stated that "the building will house admirably the company's growing business for many years will be the only building constructed entirely for telephone purposes in this part of the state. Carl D. Cushing, the president and manager, and with Mrs. Cushing the virtual owner of the business, takes a pardonable pride in the development during the last 26 years." 

Remembering Sue Fedak

(Continued from Page 1)

Not only did she serve as our treasurer for over a decade, Sue also began and organized our many art and quilt shows, and welcomed us into her home for summer barbecues.

We asked her husband, Greg, with whom she volunteered countless hours of service, what inspired her to give back.

"She wanted something to do, and to get to know people around town," he said. And "she thought the town needed an art show, to give local artists a chance to display and show off their work. Ken Goss helped her pull off the first one, and this year will be our 12th show."

In addition to her public life, Greg said, Sue "was a great mother, grandmother, and wife. She put up with me for 34 years. We went through a lot together."

Sue, you are deeply missed.

Greg invites friends to a celebration of Sue's life at **1 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 16, at the White Church** in Bethel. We'll share memories of Sue, "laugh and have a good time," he said.

SUE'S OBITUARY

It is with sadness to announce that Susan (Twigg) Fedak passed away on June 1, 2021 after a courageous battle with cancer surrounded by loved ones. She was 60 years old.

Sue was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut to Ruth Samu and Charles Twigg. She spent her youth in Rochester, Vermont where she attended Rochester High school. After moving back to Bridgeport, she met Gregory Fedak whom she married in 1987. Sue and Greg were happily married 34 years, residing in Bethel,




Greg and Sue Fedak. BHS Photo.

Vermont for the past 21 years.

Sue was very active in the community working at the White River Credit Union where she made countless friends over 20 years. She was very involved in the Bethel Historical Society and acted as Treasure, a member of the Bethel Forward Festival for seven years and in charge of the Art Show for ten years.

Sue had a passion for quilting and crafts, camping, being 'Nana' to her grandchildren and spending time with her dog Bernie.

In addition to her beloved husband, Sue leaves behind a family that loves her and will never forget her. Her children David Carleton and his partner Caitlyn Osmer. Michelle Aucello and her husband Steven. Brian Fedak and his wife Tammy. Sue had six cherished grandchildren. Katrina, Rachel, Gregory, Madison, Raquel and Taylor.

Sue will be incredibly missed and her memory will always radiate beautiful thoughts to all who knew her. Services will be private. In lieu of flowers, friends may contribute to the American Cancer Society. 

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who joined us for our Annual Meeting, and especially to our guest speaker, Carroll Ketchum, pictured here, who gave an informative presentation on the history of banking in Bethel. Photo by Maryellen Apelquist.



GROWING UP

ON NORTH MAIN STREET

By John Haikara

All stories must have a starting point. Mine starts with Grandpa and Grandma Haikara, emigrants from Finland. They landed in the USA in the turn of the 19th century. They docked at Ellis Island and settled in Rockport, Massachusetts, for a few years. Then they moved to Enfield, New Hampshire, for a while, then to Bethel, Vermont. In Bethel they bought a house on North Main Street. They raised 11 children. All my aunts and uncles and their children were all on North Main Street. We were always a close-knit group. Two other Finnish families lived on North Main Street.

I'm so glad we lived in Bethel. It was a great little town. Back then lots of work, stone sheds, quarry, tannery, veneer mill, lumber mill, farming, four grocery stores, three or four barber shops, two ice cream soda fountains, and many other businesses.

We had many nationalities living in Bethel, and we all got together just fine. Parents did not interfere with the kid's upbringing, we played all over town with no fears, and all

the older people in town kept an eye out for all of us. We all felt safe, not like today's problems.

As for things to do, we made our own entertainment. Summers we all spent many hours racing around in Shaw's pasture and on Christian Hill. We had three great swimming holes, and Butternut Beach had nice sand and safe swimming for us young ones. As we became better swimmers, we graduated to the railroad car house; there was fast water and a large rock to dive off. The third and fourth swimming places were out near the Peavine railroad, Parkers hole and across the field near Uncle Eno's house. There were enormous rocks and deep, clear water. As we got older, we rode our bikes to Barnard's Silver Lake.

Another thing we liked to do was to see who could walk the farthest on the hot railroad rails. In the fall and winter, we did a lot of skiing and sledding down the dugway hill. On Sundays, Willie Goodwin would open the town hall for roller skating. Sometimes he opened the hall so all of us young ones could play basketball. I remember it was like playing inside a refrigerator ... cold, cold. I would not trade my youth for anyone's today. ∞



JOG OUR MEMORY

*Do you know the year
of this graduation picture
and the names of any
of the graduates?*

By Beverly Striker and Jamie Striker

What a great experience. Most families consisted of two or more kids, and this makes a great backup for fun. We played baseball in the street with little traffic, just stopped and let cars go by. Not many bats, just sticks and whatever. Summer or winter, so many activities. If swimming was your choice, up to parkers, down to butternut or carhouse, depending on the time of year and how much time you had. Most had chores first and then whatever.

My big memory is the summer the boys found a nest of crows and no mama. They brought the nest home and Gramps said get rid of them, but Mom said get an eyedropper and warm milk. Everyone took turns feeding them and two survived. They named them Maggie and Molly. Maggie survived only a few days, but Molly grew and became part of our family. She learned to talk from my dad, and it was salty. I used to hide and listen when someone walked by; she would cry out, "How are you damn it?" Folks finally got used to her and yelled back.

In the mornings when Dad ate his shredded wheat on the back porch, he would give Molly a piece or two. Then she would fly over to the truck and perch on the mirror. She would ride downtown and when Dad stopped, she would make the rounds for the treats. Saying hello as she went from place to place. I remember one teacher I had, who lived at the Hotel Emery, said our crow visited her every morning before school for a treat.

Beverly's daughter-in-law Jamie says that what she doesn't tell in her story are the portions that my family tell about. My



Photo courtesy of Beverly Striker.

MOLLY THE CROW WOULD COME IN ANY OPEN WINDOW AND STEAL PENCILS OFF THE DESKS.

grandfather had a big apartment house outback of our house up on North Main Street. The crow would steal the clothespins off the lines of hanging laundry, as well as other treasures, and hide them in that old building. When it burned down all those treasures were revealed.

The old schoolhouse at the top of the bridge that the Bradleys and McCulloughs went to way back then taught first grade through 12th grade. Molly the crow would

come in any open window and steal pencils off the desks. Back then the kids had to provide their own pencils, and this was a loss to them, and the kids began accusing one another of theft. Lightning hit a big tree out back of school and it came down. In the hollow of that tree were those stolen pencils. The crow recognized all the kids of North Main Street and would often fly over them and call out. As Bev said, it imitated some salty language, and the boys loved it. But the strangers got worse cursing.

Bev told Jamie that the crow turned up missing and rumor had it that someone from Massachusetts had stolen it. Bev was only about 12 but she sent a letter to a Boston paper asking the thief to return Molly the crow. She never heard back. ∞

'PEN' DIMOCK 1908 - 1989

By Victoria Weber

Gladys Gouverneur Ogden Dimock went by the nickname "Pen" because when she and her husband, Marshall Dimock, were first together—both divorcing their spouses in order to be together—they called themselves Penny and Pete. She was the only person who called him "Pete," but most everyone called Gladys "Pen." Which was apt because she was an author, editor, rewriter in her own right and also she was the literary partner to Marshall. For decades their mornings were spent in their study—a separate building up above their home on Christian Hill—where he wrote political science books, and she edited and reworked them to make them more readable. He was the ideas man; she was the facilitator and organizer who made things work.

Pen was tall, 5'9", which was unusual for a woman born in 1908. She wore her hair in a severe bun that showed off her widow's peak and she had an upright posture with a slightly raised chin that gave her a commanding presence. That confident posture carried over into daily life. She was very confident in public, and in private too. She preferred to talk with men than with women because she enjoyed the subjects the men she and Marshall knew talked about—things like political science, public administration, government—how things actually happened in public life.

Move to Europe

Her father was a patent attorney and Pen was the first child so they were probably close. She was thrust into some adult responsibilities when she was about 13 years old and her mother took all six kids and moved to Europe—Switzerland and France. Pen was the oldest so she became her mother's partner in caring for the five younger siblings, or "sibs" as they called each other. It was always "Gladys and the sibs."

Because this article* is written for a feminist event, celebrating women's right



to vote, I will share that the reason Pen's mother moved so far away from her husband was that she had had six children in 13 years and did not want to get pregnant again. A pretty drastic step to take to achieve her goal, but it worked.

Pen's father died in 1928 at age 55, just days before her 20th birthday.

Education

Between 1925 and 1932 Pen went back and forth between America and Switzerland about three times. In the States she went through Katie Gibbs Secretarial School. Then she worked at the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, which was the first intergovernmental organization dedicated to world peace. It was established after World War I and was closed in 1946 when it was replaced by the United Nations. Pen returned to the U.S. in 1932 and attended Bennington College where—because she finished in three years in 1935—she was the first graduate. She identified more with the faculty than with the other students.

Two bits of advice she gave me that came from her tremendous organizational and administrative skills have been useful to me. First, when editing any piece of writing: "When in doubt, take it out." Second, do not wait for someone to call you back. Pick up the phone and call them. You will have the advantage of being prepared for the call, and you will not be waiting around forever for a call that may not come.

Not too long after graduating from Bennington College, Pen took an executive secretary job with Marshall Dimock

who was the Assistant Secretary of Labor under Francis Perkins, the first woman to hold a cabinet position. Washington must have been a heady place then. Pen knew Eleanor Roosevelt and they probably had a number of attitudes in common. Both existed within men's worlds.

Pen had a very practical nature, and a talent for mechanical things, not surprising since her father was an engineer as well as a lawyer. She could "rig up" a solution to just about any household problem using wire or twine or other at-hand supplies. Although she was a good and very thrifty homemaker, she was not terribly interested in domesticity, preferring the more dynamic and intellectual world of people involved in government, or academia.

Home in Bethel

Pen and Marshall Dimock bought the old Benedict farm on Christian Hill in 1940 for \$5,000 (about \$94,000 in today's dollars). They later added the Chatfield farm just up the road. They spent periods of time here between visiting professorships and other worldwide engagements, and lived here full-time from the early 1970s on. Pen was stepmother to Nan Dimock Brigham, who built her home on the Chatfield parcel.

Community

Pen had a high regard for community and that is what she especially liked about Bethel. The "caring and private" attitudes of people, and the opportunities to work together with others to accomplish some joint good, appealed to her. The most significant thing she organized and carried off were the Christian Hill barbecues, which were held for seven years between 1946 and 1952. Three hundred people came to the first couple, 750 people came to the 1951 picnic, and the number was capped at 600 for the last one.

Even with rapid-fire servers filling people's plates, it took two hours to get everyone through the serving line. A whole heifer was steamed in a converted maple sugar arch for 18 hours. The first picnics were held at the Dimock farm,

BETHEL'S COPPERHEAD

'Little' David Owen | 1863

Little David Owen was very much against the Civil War. He was what people of that time called a "Copperhead." He lived on Gilead Brook approximately a 1/2 mile up the brook from the Old Episcopal Church. It was said of him, "He never lost an opportunity to condemn the war, and everyone connected with it."

In late July of 1863, the enlistments of soldiers of the 16th regiment expired. Many Bethel men were in the 16th, and they were welcomed home as heroes from the Battle of Gettysburg. There was a big celebration going on in town, and people got to talking about David Owen. And the more the soldier boys heard, the more they wanted to teach David Owen a lesson.

Twenty to 25 men and boys, complete with a bugler, a flag, and a small artillery piece mounted on wheels, which had been captured and brought home as a souvenir, all climbed aboard a northbound train. The engineer let them all off at the Old Church hill. They marched up Gilead Road to the Owen homestead where they shot off the cannon, which shook the glass out of the sash, and of course that brought "Little" David Owen out on the front steps.

Two guys grabbed him and told him he was going to give three cheers for President Lincoln, and three more for the flag. He said he would do no such thing.

but by the time they ended people were coming from all over and they were held in a pasture at the Brown place on the DuBoise farm on the road between East Bethel and Randolph that was cut by the interstate. Tickets cost \$1 and any leftover money was donated to the Vermont Children's Aid Society, Inc.

Davis Dimock wrote an article about the barbecues for the Bethel Historical Society newsletter in 2010. Pen organized and coordinated the barbecues, organizing 40 volunteer helpers and keeping detailed records of all costs. While most items like cabbages were priced at much less than today, the price of milk was about the same as farmers are paid today. Pen was so central to the barbecues that when she was going to be away and could not coordinate them, they ended.

Unity Circle

Pen's other main means of experiencing community in Bethel was through the woman's group at the Brick Church, "Unity Circle." The name says it all. About

seven to 15 women met monthly at each other's homes and carried out helpful projects. They cleaned the parsonage and the church, held fundraising events like a soup-a-thon supper and rummage sales, and sold napkins, knives and other items. They cooked and donated their food and their recipes. They knit and sent small gifts to Kern Hatten Homes for Children in Westminster; sent dozens of cards and flowers to community members in both joyous and sad times, and supported the church with significant gifts to buy a copier or paint the interior or even to help pay the minister's salary. They sometimes discussed how they might get male church members to be more active, but I don't believe the men ever carried out the steady stream of good works that the women of Unity Circle did.

In her 1985 book, *Home Ground: Living in the Country*, Pen recounted that years ago (so probably mid-20th century), she had been told there were 60 organizations in Bethel (population


The gang grabbed a rail off the barnyard fence and rode him around the house on it until he finally gargled some cheers. Then they carried him down the road on the rail and stopped at every farmhouse so he could go through cheers again.

Back at the train track, they waited for a southbound train. And while they waited, they rubbed David all over with some sheep dip and sprinkled feathers on top of the dip.

The southbound train brought the rowdy gang back into the Bethel village. They loaded David back on the rail and paraded him up and down the street—flag waving, cannon shooting, bugle tooting, and some wobbly cheers from David.

Passing the bank (the present library in 2021), the cashier of the bank came down the walk with a revolver in hand. "Put him down. Can't you see he's had all he can take?"


They put him down. He was taken to a kind person's house to be cleaned up, and his bruises and blisters treated. When the war was over, David Owen brought legal action against the leaders of the group. He obtained a judgment against them.

At this point in our investigation, we don't know who the soldiers were, or what—if anything—they had to pay. Just interesting to know—tar and feathering, and riding on a rail—could and did happen in Bethel! 

1,500), and Randolph (population 2,000 then) had 90. She felt that the easiest way to become involved in a community was to join a church or one of these organizations.

You can read Pen's take on community in a chapter in her book *Home Ground*. She wrote about the barbecues in her first book, *A Home of Our Own*. Both are available through Amazon and should be at the Bethel Public Library.

Pen was a full co-author with Marshall Dimock of many books on public administration. She also wrote at least five reminiscences and novels during her later years.

Pen was my mother-in-law and together with Davis I lived right across the road from her and Marshall for 19 years until her death in 1989. She was a formidable person and I learned a great deal from her: 

*This article was written for the August 14-15, 2021, event celebrating Women of Bethel on the 101st anniversary of women's suffrage in the United States.

HISTORICAL
BETHEL
SOCIETY

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MAIL TO:

~ HELP US PRESERVE BETHEL'S HISTORY ~

MEET OUR OFFICERS

(elected at our Annual Meeting on Sept. 12, 2021)

JoAnn Marshall, President
Janet Burnham, Vice President
Rosalie Benson, Secretary
Ellen Davis, Treasurer

ATTEND A MEETING

Regular meetings are held at 6 p.m. on the first Monday of every month in the Conference Room at Bethel Town Hall. If the first Monday falls on a holiday, the meeting will be held on the second Monday.

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HAVE A GUESS?

Photo by JoAnn Marshall, who asks, "Where am I, and what is this?" Email or mail us your answer to be entered into a random prize drawing.



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