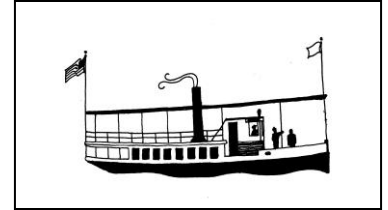


Sunapee Echoes

Sunapee, New Hampshire Historical Society, Inc.
P. O. Box 501, Sunapee, NH 03782
sunapeehistoricalsociety.org
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603-763-9872
Fall 2026



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A Silent Movie Returns Home. Join us on Sunday afternoon, 1 November, at the Newport Opera House at 2 pm to see the modern premier of *Van-ar-chy*, a silent movie produced locally by Billy B. Van in 1919. Look for places you recognize around here, and maybe even some extras from the local population. Tickets (\$15) are available from the Newport Opera House: newportoperahouse.com/ 603.863.2412.

Billy B. Van was a vaudeville star who came to Georges Mills shortly before 1900 for his health. In short order, he began buying property and built a home on Prospect Hill Road (the future Sullivan place and home of Prospect Hill Antiques) for a summer residence. He began filming silent movies—usually quite slapstick—and may have had dreams of turning Georges Mills into “Hollywood East.” At the same time, he raised a herd of prize Guernsey cows and sold dairy products in the area.

Billy’s silent movie business lasted for about 5 years. By 1920, with Hollywood turning into the mecca for movie-making, his marriage falling apart, and the town refusing to rename itself “Van Harbor,” Billy left Georges Mills to relocate in Newport. The rest of his story can be told by the Newport Historical Society and by Jayna Hooper’s 2016 biography, *Billy B. Van: Newport’s Sunshine Peddler*, but suffice it to say that Billy performed a lot of philanthropy in both towns and is credited with Newport’s appellation “The Sunshine Town.”



Van-ar-chy, the latest Van film to be found, surfaced in Sendai, Japan. Film student Kohei Okita, searching online for information about this mysterious early filmmaker, located our friend, Van Archivist John Tariot. John has now restored *Van-ar-chy*, commissioned a new piano accompaniment, and is ready to share it with us. Find more information on John’s website: billybvan.com



Billy B. Van’s silent movies, though loaded with slapstick antics starring Billy himself, have deeper significance for what they tell us about the time in which they were made. In addition, Billy intended them to be used in conjunction with a vaudeville show, presumably postponing the demise of vaudeville acts as the film industry took off. We’d love to add more Van films produced right here in Sunapee to our collection, and the hunt goes on.

See the attached flyer for more details on the November program and get your tickets now!

Sunapee’s Turkey Trot. This Thanksgiving tradition will celebrate its 20th anniversary next month. Turn the page and read all about it. It may not seem like history, but with a 20-year history, we certainly think it qualifies. We offer its story as a reminder that we should keep collecting photos, posters and more from recent events, and we hope you’ll keep us in mind. After all, they add to our history as soon as they are over!



In Memoriam. We were saddened to learn of Charlotte Brown’s recent passing. She was an active member of our community for many years, and we appreciated her support.

We hope you’re enjoying our gorgeous fall weather!

--Becky

Did you know?..... Sunapee's Turkey Trot Marks 20 Years!

Many people know of the turkey trot dance of the early 1900's—a dance done to fast ragtime music that was actually once denounced by the Vatican. But even before that, people ran races on Thanksgiving Day and called them Turkey Trots. The first on record was run in Buffalo New York in 1896. Sunapee's Turkey Trot race tradition began 20 years ago in 2007 and is still going strong today.



The Town of Sunapee Recreation Department started the Turkey Trot as a fund raiser for its projects. The 5K race begins near the covered bridge on River Street. Runners ascend Burkehaven Hill and come back into the harbor along Lake Avenue, ending near the bridge over the Sugar River outlet. That first year saw 233 participants. The largest number of runners (868) have participated in 2012 and 2014, while the smallest number was in 2020 during the height of the COVID pandemic. That year the race had a modified format to allow for social distancing.

Over the years people from at least 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Canada have trotted the route. The first winners were William Seidel from Madison WI with a time of 17:07 and for the women, Sarah Neilson of Holderness NH with a time of 20:33. Course records were set by Daniel Huling in 2011 with a time of 15:40 and by Mya Dube in 2022 with a time of 18:22.



Sunapee's Turkey Trot has developed into a real community event. The Wednesday afternoon bib pick-up features a pie sale for the schools. Thursday morning starts with a 1K Chicken Run for younger runners followed by the main race at 9 am. Both runners and walkers are encouraged to participate and viewers can also see Pilgrims, turkeys and even a chicken among the crowd. Community members also form a viewing audience with many families on Lake Avenue ringing bells to encourage the runners. Members of Sunapee's Police and Fire Departments are always there to look out for the runners. The race in 2024 followed an early season snow storm and the Sunapee Highway Department had the course cleared and well sanded for the race. The race proceeds have benefitted improvements to Dewey Field, Veteran's Field, the Skateboard Park, and the Nona Pierce Playground along with several other Recreation Department goals. And now, 2026 marks its 20th year, and it is still growing and benefitting Sunapee. We hope you'll come on down to cheer even if you're not running!

--by Kathy Springsteen

1K race for our kids



Looking for something to do?

Why not try out our self-guided walking tour of the Harbor area? You'll discover old and current photos of the historic buildings and places complete with information about them, all on your smart phone thanks to the *Sunapee Harbor Historical Walking Tour* on the Clio app!!

Or for gifts? Check out our store:

<https://sunapeehistoricalsociety.org/our-store>

Take a walk with us through the early stories of Sunapee Harbor



Download the CLIO app

and search under "Tours" by either Location or Title *Sunapee Harbor Historical Walking Tour* ~ Enjoy!



SunapeeHistoricalSociety.org
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- Follow the numbered pins on the map
- Enjoy the pictures of then and now
- Read the back story of Sunapee Harbor's historic buildings & places

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NEWSLETTER

☐ Send future newsletters by e-mail
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Sunapee, NH 03782

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Thank you!

Sunapee Echoes

Sunapee Historical Society
PO Box 501
Sunapee, NH 03782

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Sunapee's Thanksgiving Day Turkey Trot will celebrate 20 years in 2026!