

THE MILFORD HISTORIAN

Where Milford's Past Meets Milford's Present

FREE MILFORD NH, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026 12 PAGES

The Making of Milford’s Pumpkin Tradition

There's a moment at the Milford Pumpkin Festival when the pumpkins, the music, the kettle corn, and the face painting all seem to fade into the background. You step back for just a moment and realize you're witnessing something that really has very little to do with pumpkins at all: a small town coming together in an ordinary—and rather beautiful—way.

Back when it began as the Great Pumpkin Fest in 1990, nobody was thinking on quite that scale. Marilyn Kenison and a small group of volunteers were simply trying to raise a bit of money to restore Milford's Town Hall auditorium. Their original idea was to sell pumpkins around town—almost like an ice cream truck making the neighborhood rounds—before someone suggested bringing everything together on the Oval instead. The first festival was surprisingly small by today's standards. There were, of course, plenty of pumpkins, along with homemade baked goods, a few arts-and-crafts tables, and a handful of volunteers supporting a worthy cause. Among the festival's earliest supporters was Bob Kokko and his family, whose pumpkins quickly became one of its defining traditions—and remain so today.

Then Mother Nature nearly ended the tradition before it ever got off the ground. The inaugural festival arrived during the remnants of a hurricane. At one point, Kenison ducked into the barber shop of Dick the Barber, where she dried her hair



The Milford Pumpkin Festival on the Oval in 2001. Photo courtesy of Loni Quinn.

before heading back outside. "I thought we would probably never do it again," she later told the Milford Cabinet. Instead, "people came out in the rain, and we raised more money than we'd ever thought." The fundraiser succeeded, the auditorium restoration received an important boost, and what began as a practical community project quietly started becoming something much larger.

The Pumpkin Festival may feel like a thoroughly modern tradition, but in many ways, it echoes one that stretches back more than a century. A hundred years before giant pumpkins filled the Oval, Milford threw a celebration every bit as ambitious as today's festivals.

(Continued on Page 6)

A New Life for an Old Landmark

On warm summer evenings, Station 101 comes alive. Maybe it's a line of gleaming Chevys, Mustangs and vintage Volkswagens from another era. Maybe more than 200 motorcycles have packed into the lot. Often, live music drifts across the Oval as people gather around German-style beer tables overlooking the Souhegan River.

For a location that spent decades selling gasoline, Station 101 has once again become one of the places where Milford comes together.

That outcome wasn't accidental.

For years, Chip Pollard traveled the country through his work with a youth field hockey and lacrosse organization. Along the way, he kept an eye out for old service stations that had been transformed into coffee shops and gathering places.

The fascination began years earlier, when Pollard worked at a Mobil station on Long Island as a teenager, pumping gas and changing tires. They were almost always located on prominent street corners, preserving a little piece of Main Street Americana while giving the community somewhere new to gather.



Classic cars fill the parking lot outside Station 101 during one of the business's popular weekly gatherings. Photo courtesy of Station 101.

"I kept my eyes open for the perfect location," Pollard recalled. One morning, walking back to the car with his wife after breakfast at Café on the Oval, he glanced across the street. The tow trucks were gone. The piles of old equipment that had hidden the building for years had disappeared. A "For Sale" sign stood in the lot.

"I looked around," he said. "I thought, 'This is it, right here.'"

(Continued on Page 7)



IN THIS ISSUE



Town Hall Notebook

Saving Milford’s One-Room Schoolhouse. Page 3



Bowling in Milford

A bowling mecca in ‘50s Milford. Page 4



Back to School

The Rambling Reporter is going back to school. Page 11

EDITORIALS

Week of September 14, 2026

The Oval’s Next Chapter

On almost any Sunday morning, the Milford Oval is buzzing with activity. Outside the Riverhouse Café and the Café on the Oval, people wait for a table while others drift between coffee shops, antique stores, and boutiques. Spend twenty minutes downtown and you're likely to run into someone you know.

As this issue of The Milford Historian's look back at Milford in the early 1950s came together, we began collecting old business logos from the era. There was Savage's Clothing, Dyer's Drugs, County Stores, the IGA, the Latchis Theater, and dozens of other familiar names. Looking at them together, you can't help but appreciate how much of everyday life once revolved around Union Square.

That Milford is gone, and it isn't coming back. Americans shop differently today than they did in 1951. Big-box retailers and online shopping offer selection and convenience that small downtown stores simply can't match. No amount of nostalgia is going to bring back the days when every town had its own department store, grocery store, hardware store, pharmacy, and toy store within a few blocks. The interesting question isn't whether Milford can recreate the Union Square of the 1950s. It's whether Milford has found—and continues to forge—a different path.

Urban planner Edward T. McMahon once observed, "A successful downtown is a place where people want to be, not just a place they have to go." On a busy weekend morning, the Oval offers a compelling example.

Many of us still meet for breakfast on the Oval, often inside the same buildings that once housed Savage's Clothing, Dyer's Drugs, the IGA, and other familiar names. Families stop for pizza after a ballgame or ice cream on a summer evening. Community events bring people together. In an age when so much of life happens online, Milford still has a downtown people actually use.

Every breakfast, dinner, cup of coffee, and scoop of ice cream is a small vote for the kind of town Milford will be in the future—and helps another locally owned business keep its lights on.

The goal isn't to turn the clock back to 1951.

It's to write the Oval's next chapter.

If a weekend morning downtown still means waiting for a table, children lobbying for waffles, friends talking on the sidewalk, and familiar faces crossing the Oval, there's every reason to feel optimistic about its future.



FROM THE EDITOR

THE MILFORD HISTORIAN

The Milford Historian is an independent publication dedicated to connecting Milford's past with its present. Our goal is to preserve local history, celebrate today's community, and encourage residents to share photographs, memories, and stories for future generations.



Editor-in-Chief
Matt Bowling



Managing Editor
David Palance

Paintings by: Addie Luna Bowling
Published by Paper Moon Publishing
MilfordHistorian.com
Home Delivery Available
Email: editor@milfordhistorian.com



THUMBING THE FILES

A LOOK BACK AT MILFORD THROUGH THE PAGES OF TIME

75 Years Ago – Sept. 13, 1951

Summer hadn't quite loosened its grip on Milford when the September 13, 1951, edition of the Milford Cabinet landed on doorsteps three-quarters of a century ago this week. Here are a few of the things that caught our eye while flipping through the paper.

Back-to-school season was in full swing, and student reporters Ruth and Barbara kept readers up to date on the latest happenings at Milford High School. Their column reported that the hallways had been repainted pale green, and the old library had been converted into a typing room with a large window, allowing the teacher to "keep an eye on the typists." Apparently, the students of 1951 didn't need a Wi-Fi connection to find ways to wander off task.

While students were settling back into the classroom, Milford was already looking ahead to one of the community's biggest events of the season: the Grange's annual Old Time Country Fair. The Cabinet repeatedly assured readers it would be a "real" Old Time Country Fair—as if imposter country fairs had recently been invading the New England countryside.

The fair featured decorated doll houses, free ice cream, a "Miniature's Band," and a real Italian dinner prepared by the "fancy cooking work" of Mr. and Mrs. Dominic Rocca. The day concluded with a community variety show. All the makings of a good ol' country time.

Apparently September 1951 was Milford's season for all things old-fashioned. In addition to the "Old Time" Country Fair, the Purgatory Falls Fish & Game Club advertised an "Old Fashioned Dance" hosted by the venerable Win Whipple and featuring music by "The Old Timers of Milford." Indeed, plenty of "old-timey" times around Milford that week.



THURSDAY, SEPT. 13

"No Questions Asked"
Arlene Dahl - George Murphy

FRIDAY—SATURDAY
September 14-15

"Forth Worth"
Randolph Scott - Phyllis Thaxter
Color by Technicolor

SUNDAY—MONDAY
September 16-17

"Strangers on a Train"
Farley Granger - Ruth Roman

Letters to the Editor

What Do You Think?

Email your ideas to editor@milfordhistorian.com. We may feature selected suggestions in a future edition of the *Milford Historian*.



Down on the Oval, the Latchis Theatre wasn't giving top billing to a movie at all—it was giving it to the words "AIR CONDITIONED." At the tail end of a New Hampshire summer, that may have been the real star attraction. Moviegoers could also catch the long-forgotten *Fort Worth* and *No Questions Asked*, or Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*. While both Hitchcock and his thriller would become legendary in the decades that followed, the film was simply one of several movies playing at the Latchis that week. Still, moviegoers' top priority may have been less about Oscar-worthy cinema and more about simply getting out of the summer heat.

(Continued on page 3)

Milford’s Last One-Room Schoolhouse

For a building that has been "just a little too small" for generations, Milford's last one-room schoolhouse has proven remarkably resilient.

The Heritage Commission is once again trying to make sure it survives. This year, members have made restoring the Laurel Schoolhouse one of their major preservation projects, raising private donations—including a recent \$10,000 gift from the Arthur Keyes Memorial Trust—and planning repairs that include new doors, exterior restoration and a fresh coat of paint. It's not the first time the little schoolhouse has needed rescuing.

Long before it became the Scout House, the little white building that sits on the edge of Shepard Park was the Laurel School, where children of different ages learned together under one roof with a single teacher. The schoolhouse itself proved remarkably adaptable. Originally built by the Isaac Abbott family, descendants of one of Milford's earliest settlers, it was picked up in 1898 and moved from Ponemah Hill Road to East Milford as the town's population shifted toward the granite quarries. Records show local contractor David Stevens was paid just 250 bucks to move the entire structure.

Its new home was the growing East Milford neighborhood, where many Italian immigrant families had settled to work the nearby granite quarries. Surrounded by a modest village with its own stores, bakery, post office and railroad station, the little schoolhouse became the heart of a close-knit community for decades.

By the 1940s, however, Milford had begun to outgrow the one-room schoolhouse. The Milford Cabinet later recalled that a proposal to close the Laurel School met with "vigorous opposition," and the issue became "a point of heated discussion at school meetings." Neighborhood parents worried their children would have to "walk a long distance on bitter cold days" along snow-covered sidewalks to catch the bus into the Oval, while taxpayers argued the town could no longer justify keeping such a tiny school open.

In the end, there simply weren't enough children to fill even one room. By the school's final year, only ten students remained—two first graders, five second graders and three third graders—along with one lone teacher.

But it would not be the end for the little Laurel Schoolhouse.

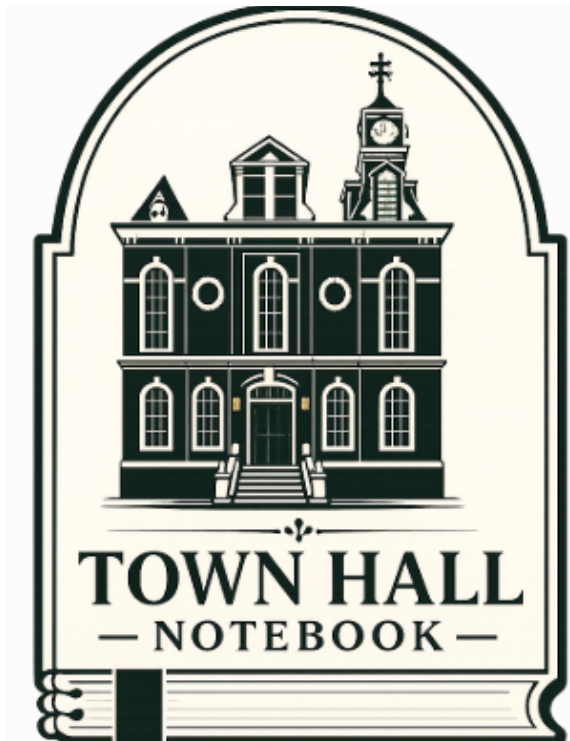
In 1952, the building was leased to Milford's Boy Scouts for one dollar a year—a second career that continues more than seventy years later. One of New Hampshire's earliest Scout troops found a home there, but eventually discovered the same thing the school had: the building was charming, but it wasn't getting any bigger. Before long, Explorer Scouts were complaining there wasn't enough room to hold Saturday night dances. Volunteers responded with an addition designed by the Scouts and built under the watchful eye of local builder Waino Kokko during a major restoration in the 1980s.

Now another generation is taking its turn standing up for the little schoolhouse. More than seventy-five years after the last class ended, Milford is once again repairing and preserving the little schoolhouse that has survived against all odds.

What Do You Think?

Is there a current Milford issue, project, or town decision you'd like to see explored in a future Town Hall Notebook?

Email your ideas to editor@milfordhistorian.com.



Above: The Laurel School today. Photo: Historic Building Conditions Assessment Report.



Above: The Laurel School in 1972. Photo: Historic Building Conditions Assessment Report.

Thumbing the Files 1951 (Continued from Page 2)

Flip past the headlines, and the advertisements paint an equally vivid picture of life in Milford during the early 1950s.

County Stores Hardware, which was still located on the Oval in 1951, was touting firearms over hammers and nails. The advertisement promoted "fall values for sportsmen and hunters," including a Remington Model 514 .22-caliber bolt-action single shot, a Winchester Model 37 12-gauge, and, lest customers leave empty-handed, "plenty of ammunition." And of course, no background checks or paperwork. Just pick up your gun and head home.

Meanwhile, Milford Home Furnishings encouraged customers to take advantage of a free home trial of a television set. Apparently, television was still new enough in 1951 that consumers first wanted to kick the tires, as it were. The Elm Street Garage invited readers to try Dodge's famous "Blindfold Test." With a drawing of a blindfolded man and an automobile, you have to look twice to realize Dodge wasn't actually suggesting he drive that way. And Boston Shoe Stores promised that its Army-type work shoe was "a whiz for durability ... and a whiz of a price, too."

All in all, it was a whiz-bang week of old-time fairs, air-conditioned movies, television test drives, and enough hometown charm to make September 1951 feel both familiar and wonderfully strange. □



"I took the Blindfold Test"

—that new Dodge Oriflow Ride sure opened my eyes!"



Come in! Try it!
FEEL HOW NEW ORIFLOW RIDE MAKES ROUGHEST ROADS BOULEVARD-SMOOTH!
Here's something new and wonderful in riding smoothness you notice from the very start!

blindfold off you'll be amazed you traveled over such bumps and chuckholes.

The big, dependable
DODGE

Says DANIEL F. HOWARD, JR., of New York City, "The Blindfold Test convinced me! The new Dodge Oriflow Ride really levels out the worst kind of bumps and ruts," continues Mr. Howard. "No ride has ever been so smooth."

Strikes & Spares in '50s Milford

By Matt Bowling

From *On and Off the Oval*

It takes a bit of imagination to envision the modest brick building at 52 Nashua Street opposite the library as a bowling alley, but throughout the 1950s, this was the local mecca for the decade's hottest sport.

In 1950, Louis Kregos petitioned the board of selectmen to allow for upgrades to what was then the three-story Martin Building, in order that candlepin lanes could be added. While one nearby tenant objected to what he imagined would be "considerable noise," Kregos assured the board that the latest innovations in soundproofing would eliminate the racket of balls and pins. After winning approval, Bowlmor Lanes ("Milford's Modern Bowling Alley") opened in September, and soon local rollers began to climb up the outside stairway to its second-floor entrance. Ads in the Milford Cabinet for Bowlmor touted its family appeal. "Not too strenuous for mother or the girls but plenty of sport for DAD or that teen-age 'he-man' too," read one advertisement.

Milford was hardly alone in embracing the sport. During the 1950s, bowling enjoyed a remarkable surge in popularity across the country, with new alleys opening in cities and small towns alike. Millions of Americans joined leagues, while families increasingly made bowling a regular part of an evening out. The local bowling alley became far more than a place to knock down pins. In many communities, it served as a social gathering place, often earning the nickname "the poor man's country club."

Milford's Bowlmor Lanes reflected that national enthusiasm. With four lanes on the second floor and four more on the third, the upstairs bowling alley never had a whole lot of space, but that did not prevent Kregos from staging a bevy of bowling events, including the Milford town bowling league, elimination tournaments, and free bowling nights for youngsters (with the boys downstairs and the girls up top). There were also some rather incredible feats and accomplishments. Kregos himself set a new alley record in December 1951, totaling 387 pins for three strings. And in 1954, local champ Guy Draper, known as "Mr. Bowling" around town, managed to bowl for seven straight hours, totaling 50 strings and knocking down 4,972 pins—all at the age of 65.

(Continued on page 8)



John Martin, owner of the Martin Building, throws the first ball at Bowlmor as Louis Kregos watches. The brand-new Wadleigh Library can be seen out the window. Photo courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.



The Wadleigh Memorial Library soon after opening in 1950. Courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.



The Wadleigh Memorial Library today. Photo: *Milford Historian*.

Milford Then & Now: The Wadleigh Memorial Library

On July 19, 1950, about 150 Milford locals turned out for the dedication of the brand-new Wadleigh Memorial Library. As they gathered for fruit punch and snacks—and to tour the new structure—the remarks made on the occasion certainly spoke to the fears of the time.

The new building, across from the former library, represented a civic step up. The older structure had always seemed like the annex it was—one speaker referred to it as "a strangely designed library building attached to the east end of our town hall." The new structure, named after its donor, Fannie Boynton Wadleigh, was a stand-alone building designed to house some 20,000 books.

Both speakers had current events on their mind. Arthur Rotch, publisher of the Milford Cabinet, commented that "we find ourselves in probably the most perilous days since the dawn of civilization. The whole world seems hopelessly divided and science has furnished weapons capable of destroying not only armies but entire populations." It was truth, knowledge and public libraries that could rescue us from such peril, he argued.

John R. McLane, son of former New Hampshire governor and Milford native John H. McLane, also seemed to have the Cold War on the brain as he contrasted the new, free library to the burning of books in "totalitarian countries." McLane proved himself an able prognosticator, predicting a time when films might occupy a place in the library and when a "federation of libraries" might provide access to more materials. Indeed, a good portion of the 1950 Wadleigh building now houses the library's DVD collection, while interlibrary loan can bring you virtually anything in print within a couple of days.



Mapping the Oval is an ongoing project to create an interactive map of downtown Milford, connecting today's buildings, businesses and landmarks with the stories, photographs, and people that shaped them. Each issue of the *Milford Historian* highlights one location while adding another pin to the growing online map. The photo here of the Milford Information Booth is courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.

The Milford Information Booth

Long before the days of Google Maps, TripAdvisor or Yelp, Milford had a rather low-tech means of giving locals information on restaurants, attractions, and other goings-on.

For nearly three decades in the mid-20th century, this small white log cabin known as the Milford Information Booth was set up in various spots around the Oval between July and Labor Day each year. A sign above it read: “Welcome to Milford, N.H. — In the Heart of New England — Settled 1738 — Incorporated 1794 — Population 5,202 — Elevation 271.”

For years, it was staffed by Edward Ruonala, a knowledgeable local who served as a kind of town-wide concierge, giving visitors a roundup of local eating dives, the most direct or scenic route to nearby destinations, and even the best place to get fresh worms — for use as bait, one would hope. More than 2,000 information seekers stopped by each summer.

In 1971, the booth was replaced by the Chamber of Commerce’s information services, which no doubt were just as knowledgeable about local businesses but didn’t quite have the same charm.



Above: Bernice Blake Perry took this photo of the Milford High School varsity basketball team in the early 1950s. Courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.



The photographs on this page show scenes from the Milford Pumpkin Festival in the 1990s and early 2000s.



Pumpkin Festival (Continued from Page 1)

In October 1911, the town hosted the Milford Industrial Carnival, a celebration so impressive that ten committees spent months planning it. Organizers mailed 10,000 envelopes around the state and handed out 3,000 buttons that simply read, "Best Time Ever, Milford Carnival, October 4–6." The Milford Cabinet called it "a big show staged by all her people to show it deserves something larger than six-point type on the next map of New Hampshire."

And what a show it was. Visitors examined clubs and dark lanterns used in "famous robberies of long ago," admired the "largest basket in the world," big enough to hold nearly two dozen men and boys for a photograph, and watched three fire companies race through town to douse the McLane factory with streams of water—not because anything was actually burning, but simply to show what they could do.

Like the Industrial Carnival before it, today's Pumpkin Festival is remembered as much for its traditions as its attractions.

Even the Pumpkin Festival itself hasn't stood still over the past 35 years.

Organizer Loni Quinn remembers a very different Pumpkin Festival in its early years. Older residents may remember Friday night variety shows with titles like *The Legend of Weepy Swallow* (or the *Tale of the Torsoless Headsman*), whose 2001 program warned audiences that "evil is afoot this night" and that a horrifying ghost was looking for revenge. They may also remember the trebuchet operated by Souhegan Valley Dollars for Scholars hurling pumpkins into the Souhegan River toward a floating scarecrow. Before today's Haunted Trail found its home in Emerson Park, volunteers even transformed an old apartment building into a haunted house one year after its owner agreed to let them use it for the weekend.

One thing hasn't changed, however: the giant pumpkins still steal the show. Each year, growers bring their biggest entries to compete in the Giant Pumpkin Weigh-in Contest, sponsored by the Kokko family, whose pumpkins also fill the festival's sales tent on the Oval, the children's pumpkin-painting area on the Community House lawn, and the Milford High School pumpkin decorating contest. The largest entries often tip the scales well north of 1,000 pounds. In 2010, for example, a 1,213-pound entry grown by Barry LeBlanc of Merrimack took the top prize. LeBlanc credited that year's hot summer for producing unusually large pumpkins and, as he told the *Nashua Telegraph*, admitted there was another reason he kept coming back: "Once you grow one, you get addicted."

Today, children line up for face painting, youngsters build their own scarecrows on the Community House lawn, and Friday night's opening ceremony features the arrival of the Pumpkin Runner, who carries the ceremonial light used to illuminate the giant jack-o'-lantern glowing in the Town Hall window. Food vendors fill Middle Street, musicians perform throughout the weekend, and, of course, those enormous pumpkins remain one of the first things visitors notice.

Spend a little time talking with the organizers, however, and it doesn't take long before the conversation turns to the volunteers. They talk about the Lions Club, Rotary, the Masons, churches, school organizations, the Historical Society, local nonprofits, businesses that stay open throughout the weekend, and the hundreds of people who quietly take responsibility for one small piece of an event that now attracts thousands of visitors each year.

Organizer Wade Campbell put it simply: "Everything about Milford is there during that weekend."

The giant basket of the early 20th century has given way to the giant pumpkins of the 21st. But the spirit that inspired both celebrations—that some traditions are measured less by their attractions than by the people they bring together—hasn't changed much at all. □



Above: Chip Pollard outside Station 101. *Milford Historian* photo.



A restored reproduction of an early photograph of the Mobil station that once occupied the Station 101 property. The original image came from the Milford Cabinet and is preserved in the Milford Historical Society archives. Courtesy of Station 101.



Fun times at Station 101 with Steve and Mike. Courtesy of Station 101.

Station 101 (Continued from Page 1)

As Pollard walked through the cluttered property, he made another discovery. Hidden behind decades of tow trucks, old engines and repair-shop debris was an unobstructed view of Great Brook flowing into the Souhegan River. Standing there, he could already picture people sitting at outdoor tables along the water. The station, he realized, wasn't just the right building—it was the right setting.

What stood before him didn't look like much. What Pollard imagined, however, was something entirely different. Nearly everything visitors see today had to be rebuilt. The floors were torn out. The plumbing and electrical systems were replaced. New sewer lines and bathrooms were installed. Standing inside the finished Station 101, Pollard gestured around the room as he described stripping the old garage almost to its bones—even down to the sewer lines.

"It needed everything," he said. "We literally had to rip this place apart."

Working alongside partner Gage Perry, the two spent nearly two years rebuilding the station from the ground up. COVID delayed supplies, expanded the scope of the project and pushed costs hundreds of thousands of dollars beyond their original estimates. But the delays also gave them time to rethink the building.

Originally, Pollard envisioned something closer to an old garage. Then his daughters offered some advice. "They looked at me and said, 'Dad, what are you thinking? If a woman isn't comfortable here, she'll never come back—and she won't let the husband or boyfriend come back.'"

As Pollard and Perry rebuilt the station, the project evolved. The bathrooms became brand new. The interior grew brighter and more welcoming and Pollard's wife added the hanging plants that have become part of Station 101's welcoming atmosphere. The result, Pollard said with a laugh, is that women now make up the majority of Station 101's social media followers.

The restoration was never just about serving beer. Pollard wanted to restore a piece of Milford's history. Long before automobiles, a saw and gristmill occupied the property, powered by water diverted from Great Brook. According to Pollard's research, the site later became home to Milford's first fuel pump in 1903. Two small SOCONY stations followed in 1924 and 1935, before the Mobil station familiar to generations of Milford residents was built in 1957.

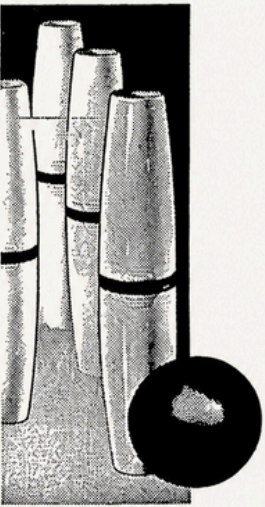
Historic photographs line the walls. Vintage gas pumps stand outside. Even the business's logo is a nod to the days when today's Route 101A was simply Route 101, before construction of the bypass routed through traffic around downtown Milford.

One unexpected chapter of the story began after the restaurant opened. Pollard didn't create the weekly classic car gathering, but when the previous organizers were ready to step away, he was happy to continue the tradition. The motorcycle nights came about in much the same way, when a local riding group asked if they could begin gathering at Station 101. Chip's answer?

"Absolutely!"

The result is one of the Oval's most unexpected sights. As drivers round the Oval—watching for pedestrians and yielding to traffic—their eyes are almost inevitably drawn toward Station 101. Depending on the evening, the parking lot may suddenly be filled with brightly colored Chevys sporting tailfins, 1970s muscle cars, vintage Volkswagens, or row after row of gleaming motorcycles, transforming one corner of downtown Milford into something that feels almost transported from another era.

(Continued on page 10)



Bowling IS FUN

for
ALL
the Family

● **THINKING PARENTS** know that the best answer to today's family problems is family activities in which **ALL** the family participate.

BOWLING is the one sport made to order for every family – not too strenuous for mother or the girls, but plenty of sport for DAD or that teen-age "he man," too.

BOWLMOR LANES
Milford, N. H.
Call 676 for reservations
When Your Whole Family Bowls
It's A Family Team!

A Bowlmor Lanes advertisement from the Milford Cabinet of Jan. 20, 1955.



The Knights of Columbus bowling team poses at Milford Town Hall. Courtesy Milford Historical Society.



Home Delivery

Have the *Milford Historian* delivered to your mailbox each month.

Email editor@milfordhistorian.com for subscription information.

Bowling in Milford (continued from Page 4)

Throughout the '50s, Kregos continued to make the most of his “upstairs/downstairs” bowling parlor. In 1952, he introduced newfangled automatic pin-setting machines. The Cabinet explained that “complicated machinery set up the pins in just eleven seconds with an intricate system of chain drives and gears.” This was indeed progress. Previously, “pin boys” were needed to constantly reset the action – and as the frequent “Pin Boys Wanted” ads in the paper proved, such employees were very much subject to availability.

In August 1961, Kregos realized his “bowling dream” when he opened a much larger venue on Elm Street, allowing the little building off the Oval to return to more mundane diversions. □

Do You Know Milford?

A.



B.



C.

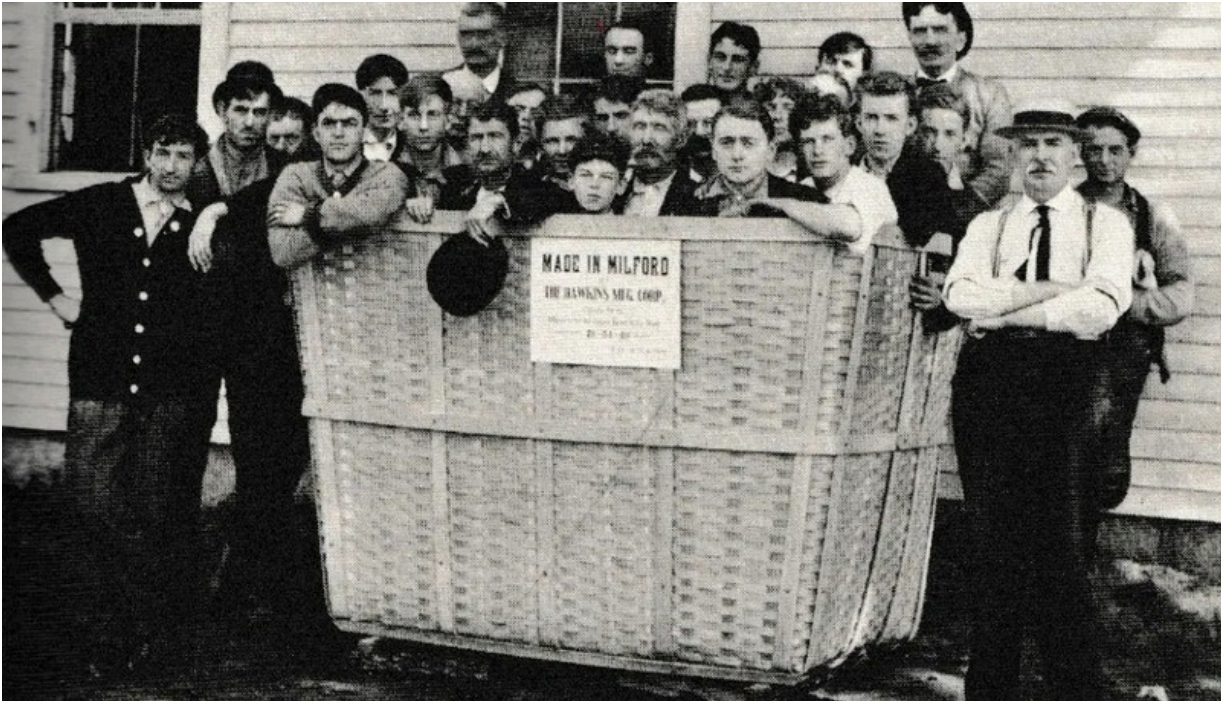


D.

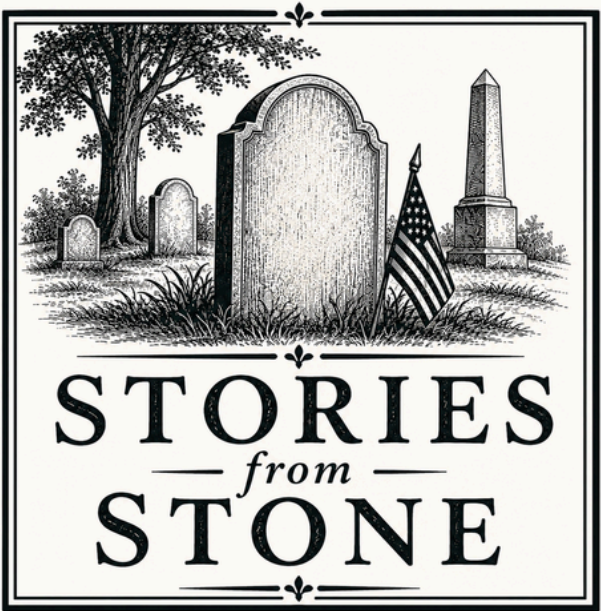


Think you know Milford? Identify these four close-up photographs and email your answers to editor@milfordhistorian.com. Everyone who correctly identifies all four will be recognized in the next issue of the *Milford Historian*.

Did you get the answers to our “Do You Know Milford?” feature in Edition 1? They were: A: the rooster outside Riverhouse Cafe; B: the drawing on the Korean War Memorial on Elm Street; C: the robot’s dog at Lou’s Custom Exhaust; and D: Harriet Wilson’s son George, depicted in the statue at Millennium Park.



The Hawkins Manufacturing Company produced the “largest basket in the world” for Milford’s 1911 Industrial Carnival. The basket is mentioned in the Pumpkin Festival story in this edition of *The Milford Historian*. Photo courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.



BY DAVID PALANCE

In a town often defined by its Puritan past and familiar old names, the story of Milford’s global roots can be told through two simple headstones at Riverside Cemetery. They mark two women who arrived in 1951, each from families shaped by Finland, French Canada, and Italy, and each determined to make this New Hampshire town their home.

Their names were Emma Goduti and Irene Kokko. They did not arrive with fanfare. But through decades of quiet involvement, good humor, and community spirit, they helped build the Milford that generations have inherited.

Emma moved to the Milford area with her husband Arthur in 1951, raising their boys and embracing the town with a kind of joyful seriousness. She loved “good, clean fun” and ballroom dancing.

But Emma’s legend was cemented in the kitchens of St. Patrick Parish, where she and Arthur became famous for hand-rolling hundreds of meatballs for the church’s spaghetti suppers. People still talk about those dinners—the warmth, the bustle, the unmistakable meatballs that fed half the town. Emma lived to 102, long enough to see the community she helped shape grow and change.

Irene Kokko also arrived in 1951, settling into a modest house on Union Street and staying there for 54 years. She became a fixture in Milford’s civic life through the Mooreland Woman’s Club, started by women who shared a neighborhood on Union Street. As part of the Souhegan Seniors group, she played bridge with the same steady group for years. Irene didn’t just join clubs; she helped sustain them. The Kokko family remains a part of Milford today through descendants involved with Kokko Builders and Kokko Realty.

Emma and Irene’s stories remind us that Milford was shaped not only by its earliest settlers but by immigrants—Finnish stone workers, French Canadian families, Italian craftsmen, and countless others who arrived quietly and stayed.

They danced, they cooked, they volunteered, they stayed. And in doing so, they enriched Milford in ways that we have come to expect from this town.

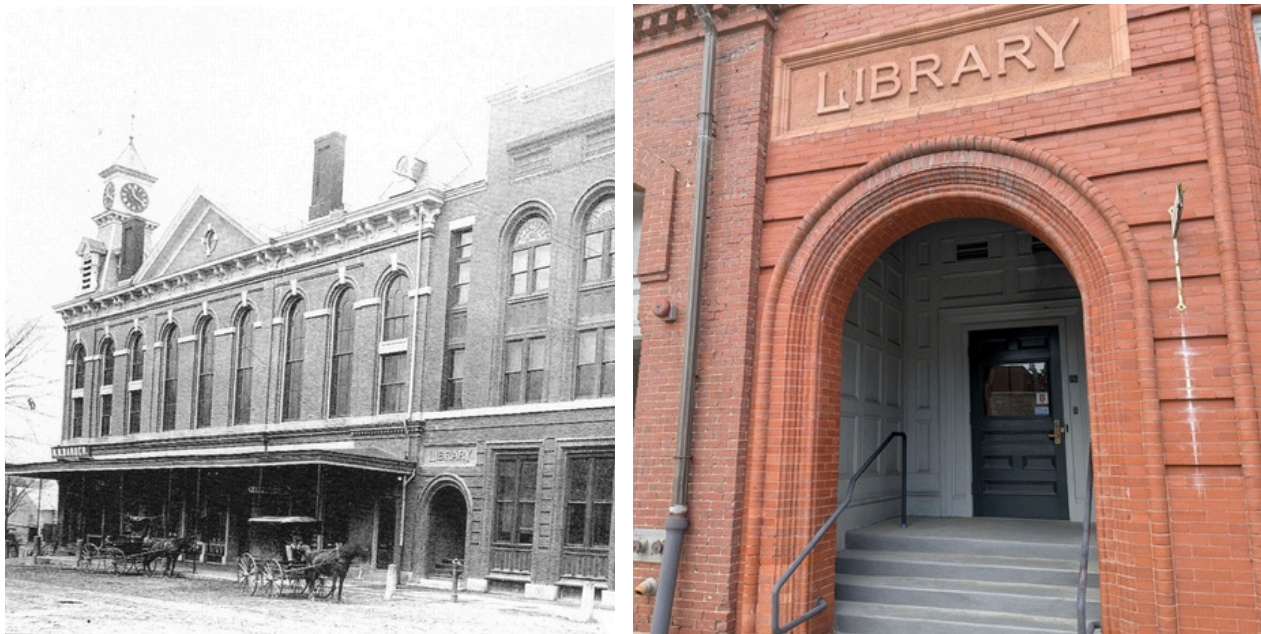


A newcomer to Milford looking for the local library could be forgiven for walking up the steps of the Town Hall Annex, where "LIBRARY" is still etched above the entrance. Until recently, a small orange cone stood in the way, so perhaps such lost bookworms are more common than one might expect.

The original "Free Library" of Milford was founded in 1868 and located in Eagle Hall (then serving as the town hall) before moving into the new Town Hall when it was constructed. Interestingly, the library's March 1891 annual report noted that "the number of books issued for the entire year was 2,410, reaching 102 families." Perhaps because this number was well down from previous years, the Milford Cabinet reported that "the expression of a desire to erect a building which should furnish suitable apartments for the library and a reading room has awakened a wide interest and monies pledged."

Such "monies pledged" eventually totaled \$15,000 for the new library project, overseen by future New Hampshire Governor John McLane. A dedication ceremony was held in June 1892 featuring an overture by Burnham's Orchestra, a prayer by Rev. J. V. Stratton, and speeches by Library Trustees Chairman F. W. Richardson and former Lowell Mayor Frederic Greenhalge. Greenhalge remarked that public libraries were the result of the "best judgment and work of the best men in the communities in which they are found."

The library remained here until Milford's present library opened across the street in 1950. The books moved, the librarians moved, and generations of readers followed—but the carved stone sign stayed behind, quietly pointing visitors to a library that hasn't been here in more than 75 years.



The Town Hall annex, where the library once stood. Modern photo by *The Milford Historian*. Old photo courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.

MILFORD IN PAINT



Fallen trees along the Souhegan River in Milford. Oil painting by Addie Luna Bowling.



MILFORD
COMMUNITY
CALENDAR

Sept 15

Souhegan Valley Chorus Open Rehearsals
Registration begins at 6:30pm,
First Congregational Church, 10 Union Street

Sep 19

Milford Health Fair
Milford Medical Center celebrates 50 years. Magician, balloon
artist, face painting, and more. September 19, 10am-1pm

Oct 6

Washburn's Apple Picking
10am-3pm. Contact Milford Recreation Department.

Oct 9,
10, 11

Milford Pumpkin Festival
On the Oval all weekend.

Oct 17

PAWS to Read | 10:30am-Noon
Wadleigh Memorial Library

To include your event in our next issue (Oct 26-Nov 23),
email editor@milfordhistorian.com

Station 101 (Continued from Page 7)

The same corner where Milford residents once pulled in to top off their gas tanks has become one of downtown's busiest gathering places. Perhaps that's why Pollard says the compliments that mean the most aren't about the food or the beer. They're about what the building has become.

Looking around today, it isn't hard to understand why. For years, the little gas station had almost disappeared behind tow trucks, repair equipment and decades of accumulated clutter. It took someone willing to look beyond what it had become and imagine what it could be. Today, its white walls, vintage pumps and busy patio have made it one of the Oval's landmarks once again. □



Advertise in *The Milford Historian*

Interested in advertising your business or organization in *The Milford Historian*?

Email editor@milfordhistorian.com for advertising rates and information.



Recognize someone?

We'd love to know who they are. Email editor@milfordhistorian.com.



With a tip of the reporter's cap to Bill Ferguson, who rambled these same Milford streets for the Cabinet years ago.

There are some moments in parenthood you know are important before they even happen. One of them is that first walk to the Jacques School. Every September, dozens of Milford youngsters, backpacks nearly as big as they are, begin a new adventure. It's a milestone not just for the children, but for their parents as well. In a way, it's a rite of passage that nearly every Milford family has experienced, or soon will.

Each morning, the journey begins at the crosswalk on Elm Street. With a smile and a wave, longtime crossing guard Miss Julie ushers groups of children safely across as traffic patiently waits. School buses line up, cars pause, and for a few minutes the center of town belongs entirely to the youngest members of the community. Once across the street, the children head down the familiar walkway toward Jacques, backpacks bouncing, until they disappear through the doors of the school. Parents linger for just a moment, watching them go before heading back to the rest of their day.

I remember making that walk a few years ago with my daughter. Looking back, it struck me that thousands of Milford families have stood in almost exactly the same place. Jacques Memorial School has been welcoming children for nearly seventy years. The faces have changed, but the emotions probably haven't.

The two photographs below capture children on that same walkway nearly seventy years apart. The 1955 image shows students leaving Jacques at the end of the school day, while today's photograph captures the beginning of a new one. Different children. Different clothes. Different backpacks. A similar journey.



Schoolchildren make their way to and from Jacques, then and now. Old photo, Milford Cabinet. Modern photo: *Milford Historian*.

When Three Schools Shared the Oval

Watching the morning drop-off at Jacques nowadays, it's hard to imagine how busy the Oval must have been back in the day.

Before Heron Pond School opened out in the woods of West Milford, all three elementary schools sat within a few hundred feet of one another. Jacques School served older as well as primary students. Next door, the old high school building served as the Bales School. And just across Elm Street, where the Milford Police Department now stands, the Garden Street School looked down over the Oval from the top of the hill.

For a little while each morning, the heart of Milford was a mob scene of kids. Parents pulled to the curb, buses arrived one after another, crossing guards stopped traffic, and streams of children headed off in every direction. It must have been a wonderfully chaotic way to start the day.

The photograph below captures students climbing the stairs to the Garden Street School in 1989. Those boys and girls, busy talking with friends and probably thinking about spelling tests or recess, are now in their 40s.

If you attended Garden Street or Bales, I'd love to hear your memories. Did you walk to school? Who was your favorite teacher? And do you remember what those busy mornings around the Oval were really like? Let us know at: editor@milfordhistorian.com



Students climb the stairs of the Garden School in 1989. Photo from the Milford Cabinet.



The Summer of the Squishy

Every generation seems to have one toy that completely takes over for a little while.

When I was growing up, it was things like Rubik's Cubes and Cabbage Patch Kids. Other generations remember Hula Hoops, Beanie Babies, Pokémon cards, or Furbies. They arrive almost overnight, every child suddenly has to have one, adults wonder what all the excitement is about, and then—almost as quickly—they disappear.

Last winter, it seemed like every child in Milford wanted a Labubu. Parents were hunting them down before Christmas, and stores could barely keep them in stock. Then, almost overnight, the craze faded away.

This summer has belonged to the squishy.

If you don't have young children, you might not know what a squishy is. Most resemble smiling little foods—a steamed dumpling with a happy face, a giant strawberry, a chocolate bar, even a stick of butter. They're made of a soft, squeezable material that's oddly satisfying to hold. (The dumplings are based on Asian-style steamed buns or dumplings, often sold in cute little takeout-style boxes.) Around Milford, they've become so popular that Toyland on Nashua Street and Serendipity on the Oval have created special displays near the checkout counter, complete with signs announcing when new shipments arrive and limits on how many customers can buy at one time.

Of course, every great toy craze eventually finds its way into classrooms, camps, and after-school programs. At first, teachers usually try to let children enjoy the newest fad while encouraging them to share responsibly and take care of their belongings. It's a good lesson in growing up. But sometimes the trading, the borrowing, the arguments, and the inevitable popped or missing squishy become just a little too much. Eventually someone throws up their hands and says, "That's it—no more squishies."

In a way, it's the same balancing act schools face with so many things today, from collectible toys to cell phones. Whenever possible, we'd like children to learn how to use these things responsibly. Sometimes, though, the distraction simply outweighs the lesson.

By the time you read this, the next big thing may already be on its way. That's the funny thing about childhood fads. They feel like they'll last forever, but a few years from now today's kids will probably smile when someone mentions squishies the same way today's adults smile when someone mentions Cabbage Patch Kids or Beanie Babies. □



Squishies have been all the rage this summer at Serendipity on the Oval. Photo *Milford Historian*.



MILFORD TIME CAPSULE: SEPTEMBER 1951

This week's Milford Time Capsule drops us into the week of September 14, 1951. On the record player, Tony Bennett's "Because of You" was America's best-selling single. Bennett was only 25 years old, one of the voices that defined popular music just a few years before rock 'n' roll changed everything. Rosemary Clooney, Mario Lanza and Les Paul & Mary Ford were among the biggest names in popular music. Elvis Presley, meanwhile, was still 16 years old, blissfully unaware that the throne was waiting.

Television was still making itself up as it went along. Variety shows like Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts and Texaco Star Theater ruled the ratings. Waiting just around the corner was a new sitcom called *I Love Lucy*, which would premiere the following month and finish the 1951–52 season at No. 3. The future was almost here. At the movies, long before *Iron Man* and *Captain America*, Hollywood's blockbuster franchise was the Old Testament. This week's attraction was *David and Bathsheba*. Moses, Samson and everyone else would get their turn soon enough.

Baseball fans were watching the Brooklyn Dodgers hold what still looked like a comfortable lead over the Giants. A month earlier it had been 13 games. Three weeks later, after one of baseball's most famous collapses, Bobby Thomson's "Shot Heard 'Round the World" would complete the miracle comeback. Nobody knew it yet.

On the road, Chevrolet once again wore the sales crown with its Styleline Deluxe, a roomy six-passenger sedan that looked every bit as substantial as America felt in the early 1950s. Tailfins, muscle cars and the interstate highway were still in the future. For the moment, chrome, bench seats and a three-on-the-tree shifter were enough to make the neighbors take notice.

At the pump, gasoline averaged about 27 cents a gallon. But before anyone starts wishing for a time machine, inflation has a way of spoiling the fantasy—that works out to a little over three dollars today. A little cheaper to be sure, but not a quarter per gallon.

In Washington, Harry Truman was still trying to convince Americans he had been right to fire General Douglas MacArthur. It wasn't an easy sell. At that moment, MacArthur looked like the hero, and Truman the man standing in his way.

Tony Bennett. Lucille Ball. Bobby Thomson. David and Bathsheba. Somehow, it all made perfect sense at the time.

