The Milford Historian

Where Milford's Past Meets Milford's Present

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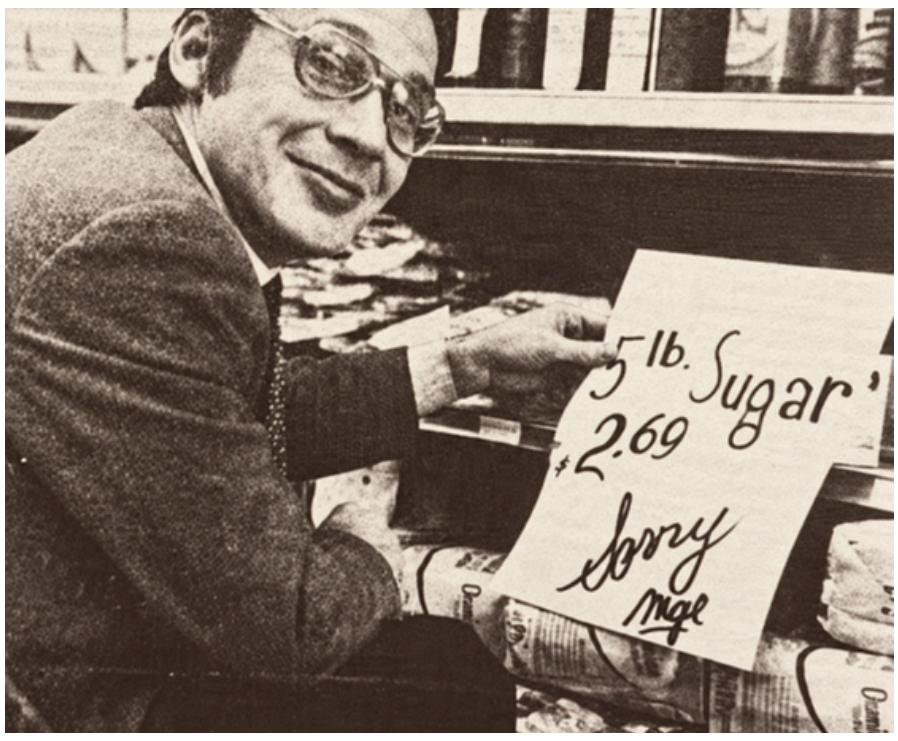
Milford’s Inflation Days

There is a particular kind of unfairness to inflation. The paycheck you brought home on Friday is the same paycheck you brought home last Friday. The dollars in your wallet haven't changed either. But sometime between trips to the grocery store, somebody seems to have changed the rules. The milk costs more. The heating oil costs more. The bag of sugar costs more. Your dollars, regrettably, have declined to participate.

That degree of economic uncertainty can be difficult to appreciate half a century later. Milford residents in 1973 were getting the full treatment. Prices weren't merely creeping upward. They were jumping fast enough to make ordinary purchases unpredictable, while shortages made some things difficult to buy at any price. Before long, even the banks were running short of something rather essential: money.

By September 1973, the problem was big enough to stretch across the bottom of the Milford Cabinet's front page: “Tight Money: How Do You Buy a House If You Can’t Get a Mortgage?” As questions go, it was a pretty good one. Milford Co-operative Bank had shut down its loan department three weeks earlier. The bank had stopped lending money for mortgages, automobiles, home improvements and major appliances, and executive vice president Richard D'Amato called the situation “the worst I've ever seen.” If you were hoping to buy a house, apparently this was not your week.



P&C’s Tim Ramage displays a sign apologizing for the price of sugar. Milford Cabinet photo.

Over at Souhegan National Bank on Nashua Street, president Paul C. Rizzi could see part of the trouble walking right out the door. “Our own depositors have helped to make this situation,” he told the Cabinet, “for they are withdrawing their funds and depositing them elsewhere.”

For Milford residents trying to make sense of all this, the explanations weren't always much help. An October Cabinet editorial recalled hearing an economist argue that inflation “really helps the little people” who borrow money. A homeowner's mortgage payment stayed the same, the reasoning went, while the value of the house increased. There you had it: inflation was good news. The Cabinet wasn't quite ready to celebrate. Whatever sense the theory made on paper, the editors suspected the logic escaped “the housewife turning her purse inside out at the checkout counter.”

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1973: Hampshire Hills Opens; Milford’s Reaction: Wow!

On a bitter January weekend in 1973, with temperatures hovering around zero, Milford residents headed out to Federal Hill Road to see what $1.5 million had bought. What they found was impressive, though evidence of the race to get Hampshire Hills ready was still everywhere.

As late as Saturday morning, the main lounge still looked, in the words of the Milford Cabinet, “a bit like a garage.” The carpeting wasn't down. The swimming pool was too cold to use. Only one squash court was ready, and work remained in the kitchen and health club areas. But construction crews were racing the clock. By late Saturday afternoon, crimson wall-to-wall carpeting covered the lounge floor, tables had appeared, and when the buffet was served that evening, the Cabinet thought the room looked more like the dining room of the Sheraton Biltmore.

Milford apparently approved. The Cabinet splashed the opening across the top of its front page with a headline that didn't bother with understatement: “Hampshire Hills Opens; Milford’s Reaction: Wow!”



Gov. Meldrim Thomson cuts the ribbon at the opening of Hampshire Hills in January 1973. Milford Cabinet photo.

Indeed, there was plenty to wow them. The centerpiece was six new indoor tennis courts — this was, after all, long before pickleball usurped one of them — but Hampshire Hills seemed to have found room for just about everything else, too: squash and handball, badminton and table tennis, a swimming pool, health spas, and even dining and lounge areas.

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1973 EDITION

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EDITORIALS

Week of November 23, 2026

Around the Same Table

There is a bit of advice that has probably saved more Thanksgiving dinners than any other: Don't talk about politics.

Most families know why. Put enough relatives around one table and eventually you will discover that Uncle Frank has some very different ideas about the state of the nation than Cousin Susan. Everybody may get along perfectly well when discussing the Patriots, the weather or Aunt Mary's stuffing. Then somebody mentions the president, and suddenly nobody is passing the gravy.

Over the past decade or so, Milford has sometimes felt a little like one very large Thanksgiving dinner. We live together, shop at the same stores, drive around the same Oval and send our children to the same schools. But underneath all that togetherness are some very real political differences. Take recent presidential elections—Milford's vote has been divided almost evenly between the two major parties. And anyone who has spent much time on a Milford Facebook page knows how quickly those differences can surface.

Flags, of all things, have demonstrated this particularly well. Pride flags on the bandstand or the size of the American flag at the World War I monument have generated passionate arguments over the years. Before long, a discussion about something hanging from a flagpole can become a discussion about patriotism, sexuality, politics or what kind of town Milford ought to be.

Those aren't necessarily arguments a town should avoid. Sometimes communities have genuine decisions to make, and reasonable people can disagree strongly about them. The problem isn't disagreement; it's what can happen when disagreement moves online. Social media has a way of turning it into something closer to shouting, often in language few of us would use if the person on the other side were sitting across the table. Democracy would be a strange business if we discussed only the things everyone already agreed about. But it works better when we remember that the people we're arguing with are still our neighbors.

Surely a community also needs some places where disagreement isn't the organizing principle. That's one of the things we hope the *Milford Historian* can provide. You don't have to agree about national politics to enjoy discovering that Milford once had a movie theater on the Oval, wonder what it was like to buy a prescription at Dyer's Drugs, or remember the circuses at Endicott Park.

History won't settle our arguments. Nor should it. But shared history can remind us that our disagreements are not the only things that connect us.

That's true of families, too. Uncle Frank and Cousin Susan may have learned long ago that presidential politics is best left for another day. But somebody remembers the Thanksgiving when the turkey caught fire, which reminds somebody else of Grandpa's disastrous attempt to carve one, and before long everyone around the table is laughing at the same story.

Milford has those stories, too—thousands of them. They belong to Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, lifelong residents and people who arrived last week. Whatever disagreements we have about what Milford should become, we can still enjoy discovering what Milford has been.

This Thanksgiving, that seems like something worth putting on the table. ✧



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.



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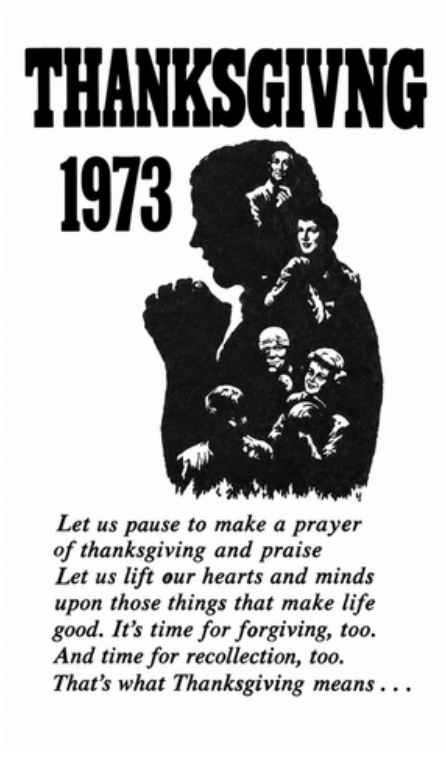
What Do You Think?

Email your letters to **editor@milfordhistorian.com**. We will feature selected writings in a future edition of the *Milford Historian*.





53 Years Ago – November 22, 1973

For this edition of Thumbing the Files, we turn back the clock to late November 1973 and leaf through the pages of the Milford Cabinet to see what people around town were reading, talking about and buying 53 years ago.

The computer age had arrived at Milford Cooperative Bank, and apparently it had a distinctive soundtrack: "Beep....beep....tic-a-tic-a-tic-a...." The bank had recently put its savings-account records on a computer. The computers themselves weren't in Milford; terminals at the bank were connected by telephone wires to the Connecticut On-Line Center near Hartford, where calculations could be performed and information transmitted back to Milford "within seconds." Among the wonders made possible by the new system was calculating interest from the exact day of a deposit to the day of withdrawal.

And there was plenty of interest to calculate. A Milford Cooperative Bank advertisement in the same issue offered 5¼ percent on an ordinary passbook account, rising to 7½ percent on a four-year savings certificate, with an effective annual yield of 7.90 percent. Those numbers look extraordinary today, but there was a catch: inflation itself was running at roughly 8 percent. Even a savings certificate paying nearly 8 percent could struggle to keep pace with rising prices.

The energy crisis was making itself felt around Milford as well. Super Save Markets on Grove Street announced that a "grave shortage of power" required some changes. Store thermostats would be set at 68 degrees, outdoor signs and parking-lot lights would go dark 30 minutes after closing, and Christmas lighting would be discontinued. Employees were encouraged to carpool and observe the governor's requested 50-mile-per-hour speed limit. That last suggestion was apparently easier said than done.

William Loeb, the famously combative publisher of the Manchester Union Leader, blamed motorists exceeding 50 on "long-haired youths" raised in "permissive homes." The Cabinet editors had made their own observations on a trip to Durham and reported that just about everyone speeding past them was instead a "well-heeled businessman on the way to the races."

Super Save, meanwhile, warned that conservation was serious business: if everyone helped during the emergency, "we may not have to experience rationing."

Twenty-year-old Dave Hunter took his father's advice to "bring home the bacon" rather seriously. Hunter won a five-minute shopping spree at the IGA supermarket on Elm Street, courtesy of the Souhegan Valley Chamber of Commerce. He had originally planned to take the cash value of the prize, but his father suggested groceries instead. Hunter "cased the store" twice beforehand, then dashed through the aisles while his brother Dean ran alongside shouting instructions. In exactly five minutes, he amassed $354.82 in groceries—about $2,700 today—including two turkeys worth nearly $20 apiece. His haul filled five shopping carts before being stuffed into his small foreign sports car.

(*Continued on Page 3*)

A Happy Problem at China Star

When Milford's first Chinese restaurant, China Star, opened on Elm Street in August 1973, its menu must have seemed downright exotic to many local diners. Replacing the steak and seafood served by the building's former occupant, Here Tiz, David and May Koon purchased the restaurant and adjoining house and spruced up both in time for the grand opening. Born in Hong Kong in 1942, David had attended college in San Francisco and served in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970 before eventually making his way east.

The opening was celebrated with a gala dinner attended by nearly 70 guests, including Selectman Walter Putnam, Chamber of Commerce representatives, bank officials, and other local dignitaries. Neatly attired waitresses escorted guests to their tables and poured champagne as FM music played throughout the newly decorated dining room. The menu featured goldfingers and chicken wings, followed by the house specialty, China Star Chicken, along with pork and rice and fried wontons. Fortune cookies and pineapple chunks rounded out the meal.

Milford residents were apparently ready for something a little more international. On opening night, the Koons were overwhelmed by the crowds and had to turn away hungry patrons from their 82-seat dining room. The following week, they ran a "Happy Apology" in the *Milford Cabinet*, explaining that the "crowd was simply more than we could handle" and asking disappointed customers to "please come again when things have settled down a bit."

The Koons operated China Star for 26 years before retiring in 1999, although the restaurant continued for more than two decades under different management. By the time the Koons retired, Chinese food was no longer quite so exotic in Milford. China Star, meanwhile, had become something even better: an old standby. ✧







From left: David and May Koon on their wedding day; an advertisement for China Star's Aug. 30, 1973 grand opening; and David Koon presenting a gift coupon to a customer. Milford Cabinet photos.

Thumbing the Files 1973 continued from Page 2

A new television was no small purchase in 1973. Bud Tates in Nashua advertised a 19-inch Sylvania color set for $389—nearly $3,000 today. For comparison, a used 1969 Ford advertised elsewhere in the very same newspaper cost $395. For six dollars more than the television, you could have bought the car.

The Cabinet had one final question for its readers: "UFO Over Milford?" Leo and Irene Saraceno of Prospect Street had watched what the paper called a "light and sound-emitting sphere shaped object" sweep across the sky early one Saturday morning. Irene estimated that it appeared three times larger than a full moon, while the couple agreed that the bright red object seemed to be spinning as it flew.

Best of all, the Cabinet published Irene's hand-drawn diagram—a UFO-like circle covered with red lights. Irene herself, however, didn't believe it was a UFO. She thought it was man-made and said the hum of a motor had attracted her attention in the first place. Whatever it was, Milford appears to have emerged from the encounter unscathed. ✧



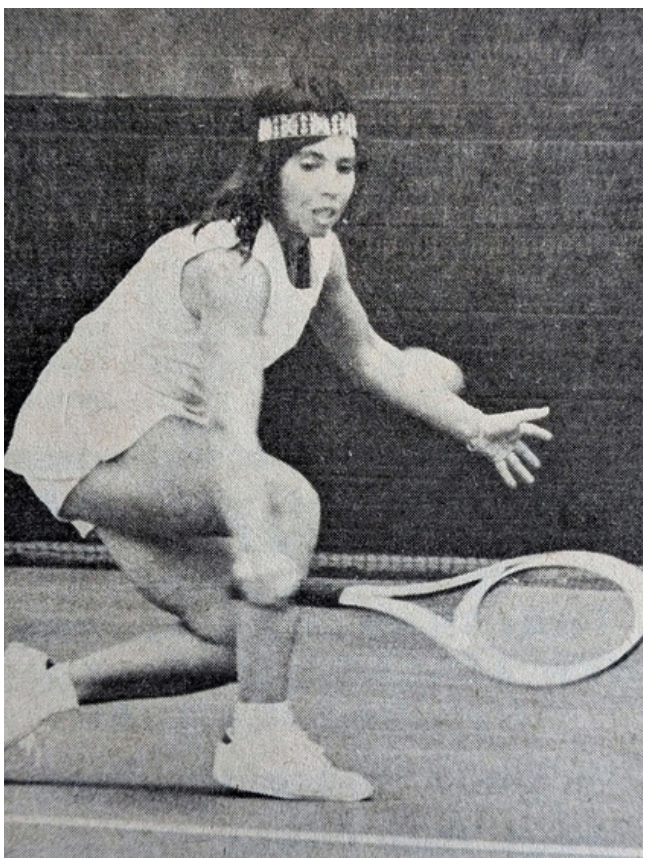
A UFO sketch and headline from the Nov. 22, 1973, edition of the Milford Cabinet.



An Ed George Radio and TV advertisement from February 1974.

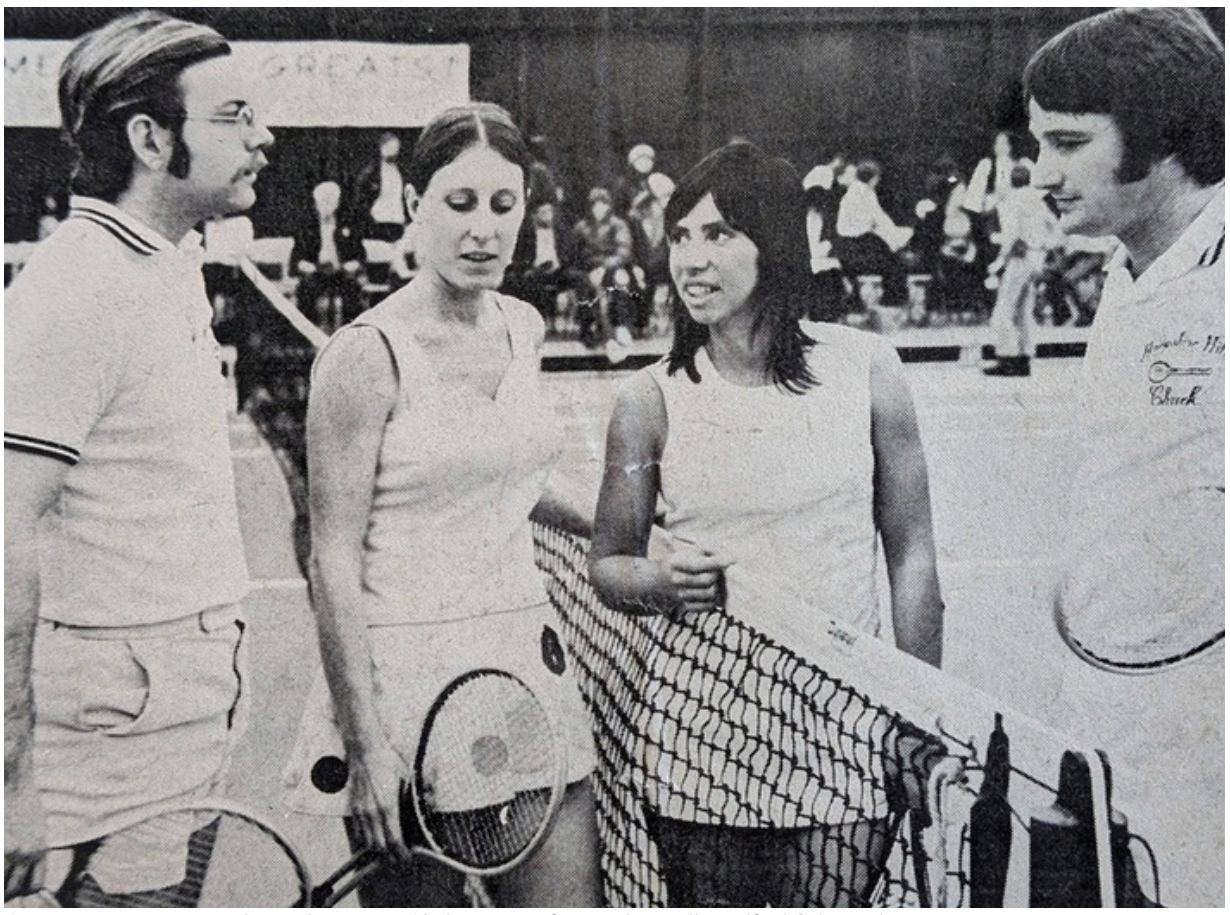


Dave Hunter races through Milford's IGA during his five-minute shopping spree in 1973. Milford Cabinet photo.





Tennis star Rosemary Casals plays an exhibition match and speaks with Hampshire Hills president John J. Barretto during opening weekend in January 1973. Milford Cabinet photos.



A meeting at center court during the January 1973 opening of Hampshire Hills. Milford Cabinet photo.



Carlton Fisk shakes hands with emcee Bob Lobel during a 1975 appearance at Hampshire Hills.

Hampshire Hills (continued from Page 1)

Opening week gave visitors a taste of nearly all of it, with guided tours and buffets, water ballet and diving exhibitions, squash matches and live music from a Berklee College of Music combo. On Sunday afternoon, newly inaugurated Gov. Meldrim Thomson dropped in to cut the ribbon.

It was an ambitious undertaking for a town the size of Milford — and, as it turns out, Hampshire Hills almost wasn't built in Milford at all.

The original plan was to build in neighboring Amherst, which in some ways might have seemed the more predictable address for an upscale tennis club with international aspirations. Current Hampshire Hills owner Rick Holder says the developers had property under option there and had already done the design work. Amherst, however, had other ideas. According to Holder, officials balked over concerns that the development might affect the Minot J. Ross Memorial Bird Sanctuary in Amherst.

So Milford got Hampshire Hills instead. The developers found another site here and started over. The idea for what would eventually become Hampshire Hills had considerably humbler beginnings, years earlier at Fletcher Quarry in Westford, founder John J. Barretto had set up two tennis courts, a small swimming pool and a recreation building where workers could bring their families on weekends. Sundays there became something special.

“That was my passion,” Holder remembers John Barretto telling him. “I just lived for that day of the week, where everybody could get together.”

Barretto's son, John F., had meanwhile toured some of the tennis clubs then springing up around New York, Connecticut and Boston and encouraged his father to think bigger.

Somewhere between those Sunday afternoons at the granite company and the opening of Hampshire Hills, however, “bigger” became downright international.

The family gathering place Barretto had imagined grew into something approaching a destination resort in a small New Hampshire town. There were plans for major tennis tournaments and, eventually, even a “village” of detached condominiums. The dining room wasn't intended merely as someplace to grab a sandwich after a match, either. Holder remembers it in its heyday as a “destination restaurant,” complete with a maître d’.

“People were coming here to kind of watch people run around in skimpy tennis clothes while they dined on foie gras and Chateaubriand,” Holder recalled.

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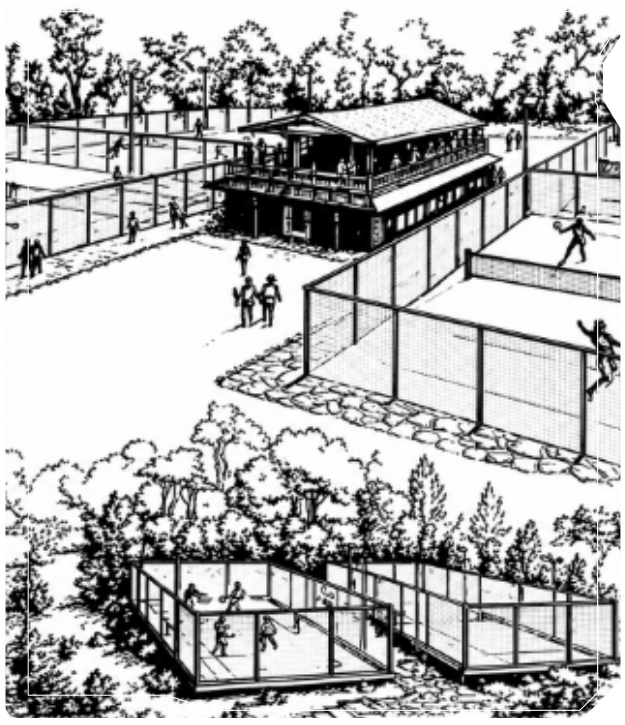

An early rendering shows the tennis courts and clubhouse planned for Hampshire Hills.







Milford's Baptist Church on South Street, demolished in 1973 to make way for a bank. Courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.

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 Lost Cornerstone

When Milford's Baptist Church was built on South Street, its cornerstone was laid with considerable ceremony on June 3, 1874. Inside went a copper box containing photographs, newspapers, a list of church members and officials, a history of the Hutchinson family and other items intended to tell future generations something about Milford in 1874. The new church, much of it paid for through bake sales and dinners organized by the women of the congregation, was completed the following February at a cost of $25,000.

There was just one problem with this carefully preserved message to the future: the future forgot it was there. When the church was demolished in 1973 to make way for a bank, nobody remembered the cornerstone until afterward. The men who razed the building and removed most of its granite foundation blocks had no recollection of seeing it. One thought it might have been dumped into the old foundation hole before the site was filled with gravel. As William Ferguson wondered at the time, "Exactly what 'in the cornerstone' meant is not clear — was the stone hollowed out like a chamber? Was more than one stone used to enclose the box?" A metal detector was suggested. Perhaps construction of the new bank would uncover it. Apparently, neither did. As late as 1978, *The Granite Town* reported that the cornerstone had never been found.

Today, TD Bank stands on the site of the old church, and the whereabouts of its 1874 time capsule remain a mystery. Maybe it was hauled away with the granite. Maybe it lies beneath some entirely unsuspecting patch of Milford. Or perhaps that copper box is still somewhere under the bank property, patiently waiting for someone to remember it a second time.

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The Year Milford Almost Lost Summer Vacation

There are certain things schoolchildren have traditionally regarded as beyond the reach of adults. Christmas morning is one. Your birthday is another. And then there is summer vacation.

In 1973, Milford decided to take a hard look at that last one.

The idea was called the "flexible school year," and it was being tried in various forms around the country. Nobody was proposing that Milford children spend 365 days a year behind a desk. Students would still attend roughly the same number of days, but different groups might go to school—and take their vacations—at different times. The idea was to keep the schools humming all year without ever having everybody there at once. That was particularly appealing in Milford, where the Junior High was already badly overcrowded. If you could fit more students into the same buildings, perhaps you wouldn't have to build so many new ones. And that could save the town a lot of money.

The Milford Cabinet came up with a wonderfully simple way to explain it: think of four people singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" as a round. Everybody sings the same song. They just start at different times.

Now do it with several hundred schoolchildren. By January, a six-member Flexible School Year Committee was already at work under chairman Joseph "Joe" Beaudoin. The committee expected to spend more than a year investigating the idea, involving students and townspeople, studying other school systems and figuring out whether it could actually work in Milford. Voters later put $3,000 behind the effort for an in-depth study. If everything somehow fell into place, 1974–75 was mentioned as the earliest possible starting date.

There were attractive possibilities beyond saving space. Families might someday choose vacation periods that better suited them, while students and teachers could have more flexible schedules.

Of course, somebody had to create those schedules. One Cabinet article described a 45-days-on, 15-days-off calendar that "looked like a comb with 365 teeth," with four different colors showing when each group of students would come and go. In February, committee members traveled to Vermont to see a year-round school in operation. They came home with both encouragement and warnings: flexible schooling could work, but it wasn't a magic cure for overcrowding, and communities had better know what they were getting into.

Milford was about to demonstrate that last point.

Arranging hundreds of students, teachers and classes into all those different schedules was no small matter. Officials even considered spending $12,000 to turn the problem over to a computer and let it sort everything out. Beaudoin argued that without the computer study, the committee could produce only a "vague" report; with it, they could tell individual students and parents precisely how the new calendar would affect them.

Then came the snow days.

(*Continued on Page 8)*



Joseph "Joe" Beaudoin, chairman of Milford's Flexible School Year Committee.

MILFORD THEN & NOW



Hampshire Hills on opening weekend in 1973. Courtesy of Rick Holder.



Hampshire Hills today from the same vantage point. *Milford Historian* photo.

Milford Then & Now: Hampshire Hills

More than half a century separates these two views of Hampshire Hills, but the building is remarkably recognizable. The 1973 photograph, taken on opening weekend while work was still being finished, shows an unfinished drive, sparse landscaping and the club's original entrance canopy. The distinctive peaked rooflines and massive front wall, however, remain much the same today.

Over the years, the exterior has changed, the entrance has been remodeled, the original globe-topped lights have disappeared and the once-small trees and shrubs have grown up around the building. Even the approach follows essentially the same path. Despite all those changes, Hampshire Hills as it appeared when it opened in January 1973 remains remarkably easy to recognize.



A 1973 advertisement for the Hampshire Hills health club.

Hampshire Hills (continued from Page 4)

Milford, New Hampshire, in other words, was taking a rather large swing.

And the international ambitions weren't merely ambitions. The club wasn't content merely to build six indoor courts. It somehow persuaded some of the best tennis players in the world to come play on them.

Rosemary Casals and Françoise Dürr opened the courts with exhibition matches and mixed doubles against Hampshire Hills professionals. If the names don't immediately ring a bell, they were not obscure tennis players. Both reached No. 3 in the world. Dürr had won the French Open singles championship, while Casals was a two-time U.S. Open singles finalist and one of the great doubles players of her generation. Both would eventually enter the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

Dürr also provided some entertainment between matches. While waiting for one to begin, the umpire asked the crowd, "Will everyone please sit down?" Dürr promptly sat down — right on the court. Rather than retreating to a hotel afterward, the French star stayed with the Rambling Reporter himself, Bill Ferguson, and his wife, bringing along her six-month-old Airedale, Topspin.

Dürr was impressed with the new club, even in its unfinished state. "I've seen these places all over the world but this is the best one," she told Ferguson. When he suggested she might simply be flattering her hosts, Dürr insisted she wasn't. "Hampshire Hills" — which the Frenchwoman pronounced "Ampshire Ills" — had everything together in one place, she explained: tennis and other racquet courts, swimming, athletic rooms and a restaurant. "It is fantastic."

And that was only the beginning.

Even before Hampshire Hills opened, the Cabinet had struggled to convey just how unusual what was coming next would be. If someone announced that the next World Series would be played in Milford, the paper suggested, it would be roughly equivalent to what Hampshire Hills was attempting in the tennis world. The $30,000 Cliff Drysdale Invitational featured six of the world's leading professionals — Cliff Drysdale, Nikola Pilić, Bobby Lutz, Tom Gorman, Charlie Pasarell and John Alexander — a lineup described by one Hampshire Hills employee as "a litany of saints."

Even legendary tennis writer Bud Collins was struck by the setting, calling Milford "an unlikely place for a $30,000 tennis tourney" — and, for that matter, "an unlikely amount of dough."

Apparently six world-class tennis players weren't enough celebrity for one health club. Two years later, Hampshire Hills landed perhaps its biggest New England sports celebrity yet.

On October 30, 1975, more than 500 people gathered at Hampshire Hills for turkey dinners and a chance to see Carlton Fisk. Just nine days earlier, the Red Sox catcher had bounced down the first-base line, frantically waving his towering fly ball fair before it struck the foul pole for one of the most famous home runs in baseball history.

Now Fisk was in Milford to receive the Granite State Sportsman of the Year Award.

Throughout the evening, youngsters were called forward to receive baseballs autographed by Fisk, who was presented with a suitably Milford gift of his own: a 65-pound plaque made from Milford granite. But Fisk spent much of the evening signing still more autographs before and during dinner. And when the festivities were over, he stayed behind, refusing to leave until every last child waiting in line had received one.

Hampshire Hills would change considerably in the years that followed. When Holder first came to evaluate the struggling club in 1985, he spent two weeks there undercover and remembers that not a single employee asked if he needed help or even whether he was a member. He soon became general manager and began changing the culture.

The grandest of the early ambitions faded. Hampshire Hills never quite became Wimbledon East, and the days of the destination restaurant and international tennis stars eventually passed. But more than half a century after that frantic opening weekend, the club is still thriving. Under Holder, Hampshire Hills became less about attracting famous names and more about knowing the names of the people who walked through the door — closer, perhaps, to the family gathering place John J. Barretto had imagined in the first place. ✧



Tennis courts under construction at Hampshire Hills before the 1973 opening. Courtesy of Rick Holder.

Milford's Inflation Days (continued from Page 1)

Then came gasoline. As the energy crisis tightened its grip, Milford motorists waited in lines that sometimes stretched out of filling stations and down the street. Some stations limited customers to $3 worth of gas, hoping to discourage the "gas hogs" who filled their tanks to the brim; others were reportedly bone dry by 11 in the morning or noon. An even-odd license plate system appeared at some stations. Others simply closed. For a time, Milford was left with just one fully functioning station, leaving drivers to get out their maps and go hunting for someplace—anyplace—that might still have gasoline.

That got people more than a little jumpy. Bill Ferguson of the Cabinet described sitting in one traffic jam when "a car up ahead pulled out of line and immediately half a dozen cars lined up behind, assuming the first car was getting gas." The poor driver may have simply been going home.

Local businesses did what local businesses do in times of crisis: they advertised. In December, Milford Atomic Sub & Pizza Shop on Nashua Road unveiled an "Inflation Fighter." Buy one pizza at the regular price and the second cheese pizza cost one penny. "No Limits — No Gimmicks," the advertisement promised.

It was easy enough to laugh at some of this. Underneath it, however, was genuine fear. Of course, looking back, we have the considerable advantage of knowing that things would turn around eventually. Milford residents in 1973 did not. For anyone older than 50, the Great Depression was still a living memory. Banks weren't lending. Prices were racing upward. Shortages were appearing.

Milford resident Dorothy Warner put that anxiety plainly in a September letter to the Cabinet. "There is a feeling of fear and hopelessness in the country today," she wrote. "We are worried about galloping inflation, which cannot go on forever, but must end in recession or a real depression." Her letter appeared beneath the headline "That Depressed Feeling; Have We Lost Our Nerve?"

Milford, of course, had not somehow invented all of this. The forces behind the turmoil stretched around the world, from decisions made in Washington to the oil embargo imposed by Arab petroleum producers in the fall of 1973. But the pages of the Cabinet show what a national economic crisis looked like once it made the trip to a small New Hampshire town.

Unfortunately, 1973 did not take inflation with it when it left.

By November 1974, the Cabinet was reporting on yet another extraordinary price surge, this time involving sugar. Milford grocers were dealing with rapidly changing prices and steering customers toward substitutes. At P&C Grocery, manager Tim Ramage stood beside a handwritten sign announcing the price of a one-pound package of sugar: $2.69. Beneath the price he had added one more word.

"Sorry." ✧



A 1973 Super Save advertisement encouraged Milford residents to conserve energy.



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Students enter Garden Street School following a fire station event in the 1970s.



Members of the Milford Teachers Union meet in 1973. Milford Cabinet photo.

Flexible Schools (Continued from Page 6)

Beaudoin had an idea for introducing teachers to the flexible school year: why not use some of the days already set aside for snow? He asked state education officials whether some could be used for teacher workshops explaining how the new system would work. He was even prepared to travel to Concord to pursue the request. This, apparently, was a step too far.

As the clock struck midnight, a public budget meeting at Town Hall finally adjourned. But nobody was going home just yet. Less than five minutes into the new day, the School Board called itself into special session. Beaudoin was told not to take his snow-day request to Concord, and the Board ordered the Flexible School Year Committee "to terminate the study until further notice."

The study sat largely dormant until summer, then resumed. And now the committee began running into the sort of details that a 365-tooth calendar didn't solve. Take Physics. Suppose Milford had only one Physics teacher. If students were divided among different schedules but Physics still had to be offered throughout the year, would that teacher need a longer contract? What would that do to the promised savings? As the committee put it: "What if, for instance, you have but one Physics teacher? When do you offer Physics?"

And Physics was only the beginning. Would the school buses run all year? What about the custodians? When exactly did you scrub down and repair a school that never closed for the summer? Would teachers need longer contracts? And what about a 95-degree July afternoon in a classroom with no air conditioning? The deeper the committee went, the more the flexible school seemed to lack flexibility.

It also became increasingly clear that Beaudoin and the School Board had rather different ideas about what the committee was supposed to be doing. Beaudoin believed a meaningful study required digging into Milford's curriculum and figuring out exactly how courses, teachers and students could be arranged under a flexible calendar. The Board maintained that curriculum was outside the committee's assignment. By late October, it put the study on hold again.

That was enough for Beaudoin. On November 1, he resigned as chairman and committee member, saying he still "earnestly" believed in the year-round concept but accusing the School Board of having "purposely attempted to sabotage the study to prevent its completion." The dispute had become partly about what Milford voters had actually authorized: Beaudoin pointed to the $3,000 appropriation as evidence that they wanted an in-depth investigation, while the Board appeared to want a narrower feasibility study. Beaudoin replied that he could write that kind of report "in an afternoon"—but it wouldn't tell voters much of anything.

After a year like that, one might expect the Great Milford Summer Vacation Question to end with another midnight meeting, an angry Town Meeting vote, or perhaps children marching around the Oval carrying beach towels.

Instead, it just sort of petered out.

At the March 1974 School Meeting, after most of the evening's business had been handled, somebody apparently remembered the previous year's unfinished project.

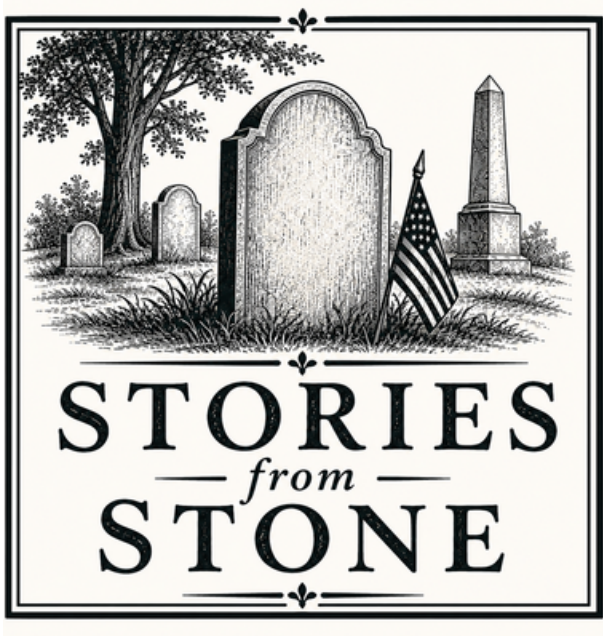
"And oh yes," the Cabinet reported, "someone asked: what about the flexible school year committee report?"
Officials said the feasibility study would proceed once a new chairman was appointed. The $3,000 voters had approved, they added, hadn't been spent.

Beaudoin, meanwhile, had found himself another school-related project. Only a few months after resigning and accusing the School Board of sabotaging his committee, he ran for a seat on the School Board. He won by 12 votes, and by June was sitting on the very board he'd spent much of 1973 battling.

The flexible school year never enjoyed a similar comeback. When the idea surfaced again in 1976 as a possible alternative to constructing additional school space, the School Board concluded that it—and double sessions—would be expensive and "would not be satisfactory from an educational point of view."

And that seems to have been that.

Milford kept its traditional school calendar. Children kept their summers. And "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" remained considerably easier when everyone singing it was in the same room. ✧



BY DAVID PALANCE

Some people enter history by founding a town. Others get there because a very large dog has chosen a very poor place to stand. Robert "Wolfie" Pelchat's first memorable appearance in the *Milford Cabinet* belonged to the second category.

In December 1938, Willard Jennison's Great Dane broke through the ice on Railroad Pond. Pelchat, Ruth Beliveau, John Smith and Robert Fitz, all preteens, fetched the rescue ladders kept available by the Milford Boy Scouts. They formed a human chain and worked toward the struggling animal, but the ice kept breaking beneath the dog's weight. Somehow, the four youngsters managed to pull the dog to safety. Everybody went home, and the dog supplied no statement for the press.

Born in Milford on February 22, 1925, Pelchat grew up locally and remained a lifelong resident. He married Norma Varley in 1945, when his occupation was listed as carpenter at the Bourn Furniture Company. Later, he operated his own painting business for 25 years. Robert and Norma lived on West Street and raised three daughters. "Painter," in this case, meant a tradesman, not an artist creating a retrospective. His connection with the library's 1955 student art exhibition neatly settles the distinction. He painted the windows and trim in preparation for the show. Both jobs require brushes, but only one masterpiece was likely to come home with a ribbon.

His work covered an impressive amount of Milford's scenery. Newspaper accounts identify the Bales School auditorium in 1950, the Mayflower Hill standpipe in 1960, Eagle Hall in 1961, the bandstand in 1968 and Town Hall in 1971. A town may celebrate its architectural heritage in speeches, but sooner or later somebody has to bring a ladder. The research tally finds at least 72 mentions of Pelchat in the Milford Cabinet. They range from community activities and painting contracts to an S&H Green Stamps award for filling three books. This is one of the pleasures of a local newspaper archive: national history has treaties and coronations; a small town also has a man completing his stamp books. The small entries help restore the scale of an actual life.

(Continued in the column to the right)



Robert Pelchat's gravestone in Riverside Cemetery. *Find a Grave/Judy Hohelnadell* photo.



THE PAST IN PLAIN SIGHT

If you've walked past the granite stage at the entrance to Keyes Field and thought, "Nice stage," you were right. You were also selling it a little short.

Those stones have already held down another job. According to the Milford Historical Society, they came from the remains of a stone shed on Tonella Road, part of the Tonella & Sons quarrying operation. The company closed in 1931, but some of its building material eventually found work in the performing arts. Milford does like to keep its granite busy.

A plaque credits the deMontigny family's granite donation in memory of Suzanne "Bam" deMontigny, whose quarry home was a gathering place for family and friends. The location has an unexpected résumé, too: it's a cleaned-up portion of the Fletcher's Paint Works Superfund site. "Superfund" seldom appears in the opening paragraph of a tourism brochure, but this story improves considerably. Following extensive cleanup, the stage was completed in 2019 with donated labor and materials. An old quarry business, a family remembrance, and an environmental comeback—all tucked beneath that handsome wooden roof.



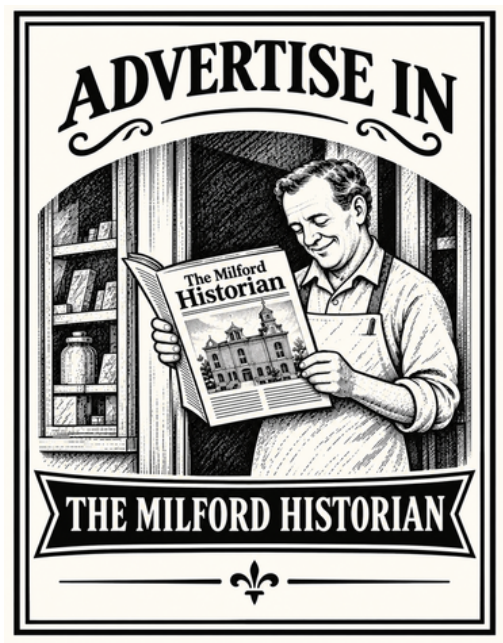
The granite stage at Keyes Field was completed in 2019. Its stonework includes granite donated by the deMontigny family in memory of Suzanne "Bam" deMontigny. *Milford Historian* photos.

Pelchat served on building and budget committees, and ran unsuccessfully, for selectman. His obituary records civic involvement, membership in St. Patrick Church and service in the Milford Council of the Knights of Columbus, including the position of Past Faithful Navigator of the Fourth Degree. Behind the nickname "Wolfie" stood a life of family, work and local obligations. Not every contribution arrived with a headline, and not every headline involved a Great Dane.

In August 1973, Pelchat became ill while at work and died at a Nashua hospital. He was 48. His death certificate attributed his death to a heart attack and also noted a secondary heart condition. Like many painters of his generation, Pelchat had spent years working around lead-based paint, although the surviving record does not establish whether that exposure played any role in his death. The Cabinet's brief account cannot measure what that loss meant at home.

The dog rescue remains the most dramatic episode in the surviving research. But a life need not spend every year improving on its best newspaper headline. Pelchat grew up, worked, raised a family and took part in his town.

Some days history required courage on the ice. Most days it required showing up with a paintbrush and ladder. ✧



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MILFORD COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Nov 27-29 — **Festival of Trees for SHARE**
Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m.–7 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.
First Congregational Church Parish House.

Nov 29 — **Christmas Stained Glass Workshop**
11 a.m. The Central Birch Art Studio, 187 Elm Street.

Dec 6 — **Comedian Bob Marley**
7:30pm. Amato Center for the Performing Arts.

Dec 12 — **Milford Fourth Annual Holiday Craft Fair**
10 a.m.–2 p.m. VFW Post 4368, 99 VFW Way.

Dec 12 — **Open House - Milford Historical Society**
2pm at the Carey House.

Dec 12 — **Breakfast with Santa**
8:30–10 a.m., Milford Town Hall.

Dec 19 — **Milford Indoor Winter Farmers Market**
10 a.m.–1 p.m. Jacques Memorial School.

Dec 20 — **Winter Night Light Workshop**
9 a.m. The Central Birch Art Studio, 187 Elm Street.

To include your event in our next issue (Dec 21-Jan 24), email editor@milfordhistorian.com

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*.



Recognize someone?
We'd love to know who they are. Email **editor@milfordhistorian.com**

CLASS OF '73



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

A few years ago, I watched *Stranger Than Paradise*, Jim Jarmusch's movie about several young people who spend a remarkable amount of time sitting around apartments with apparently nothing to do. I like Jim Jarmusch. I like slow movies. I am perfectly capable of watching two people stare out a window for seven minutes if there is some artistic justification for it.

But even I found this one boring.

What stayed with me, though, was the apartment. There was a television, but television meant whatever happened to be on television. There was a radio, but the radio played whatever the radio station decided to play. You could listen to one of the records you owned. You could read something. You could play cards. You could talk to the other person in the room. And eventually, unless something interesting came on TV, you might simply have to be bored.

The movie was made eleven years after the year we're visiting in this edition of the Milford Historian. But the basic media universe wasn't terribly different. So the Rambling Reporter has been trying to imagine an ordinary Milford living room in 1973.

Let's see what we've got.

There's probably one television set. Maybe it's color; maybe it isn't. You have CBS, NBC from Boston and ABC (on NH's Channel 9) assuming the antenna is cooperating, along with whatever local and UHF stations you can pull in. Somewhere there's a radio. Perhaps there's a stereo with a stack of LPs and 45s. The Milford Cabinet arrives once a week. Maybe the Union Leader or a Boston paper arrives every morning. There might be a Time or Newsweek on the coffee table and a TV Guide nearby. There are books.

And that's pretty much it.

If you want to see a movie, you go to a movie theater. If you want a new record, you go to a record store. If you want to learn more about something, you find a book about it, assuming somebody has written one and the library has it. There is no device in your pocket containing nearly every song ever recorded, thousands of movies, virtually every newspaper in the world, endless video and the collected arguments of several billion people.

By our standards, the 1973 living room seems almost comically limited.

But something interesting happened because of those limitations: everybody else's living room was limited, too.

One little ritual I remember from childhood now seems almost impossible to explain. On weekends, I would go down to the record store at the Dedham Mall and pick up a printed copy of the week's Top 40. It was free, and I would bring it home and study it. I knew practically every song on it.

More importantly, so did everybody else.

Elton John's "Crocodile Rock" hit No. 1 in 1973. You didn't have to be an Elton John fan to encounter "Crocodile Rock." It was simply floating around in the atmosphere.

Today, the opposite is possible. A musician can be enormously successful, with millions of devoted fans, sold-out concerts and songs streamed hundreds of millions of times, while another person of roughly the same age can live happily for years without hearing a note of it. We haven't run out of popular culture. We've produced so much of it that each of us can assemble our own.

And let's be clear: that's pretty wonderful.

If you become interested tonight in an obscure band from 1978, you can probably hear its entire catalog before bedtime. You can spend an evening watching videos made by somebody with 14,000 followers who happens to share your fascination with vintage toasters.

I don't actually have a fascination with vintage toasters. But I have little doubt that somebody does.

We've gained an almost unimaginable amount of choice. What I'm less sure we noticed was what we gave up in exchange.

It wasn't just music. If something happened in 1973, most Americans learned about it from a remarkably small collection of sources. They watched one of three network news broadcasts. They read their local newspaper. Some read the New York Times. They picked up Time or Newsweek. Those institutions had enormous power to decide what counted as news, which voices were heard and which ones weren't. There are plenty of good reasons not to want that world back.

But it also meant that millions of people began the next morning having watched roughly the same news the night before.

The same thing happened with television, movies and sports. A popular television program wasn't one selection among thousands waiting patiently for you on a streaming menu. It was on Thursday at 8:30, and if you wanted to see it, Thursday at 8:30 is when you'd be parked in front of the TV. And for a good part of the year, Thursday at 8:30 might bring you an episode you'd already seen. I can remember sitting through reruns of perfectly ordinary Family Ties episodes as a kid—not because I particularly wanted to see them again, but because, well, it was Thursday at 8:30.

A baseball game took three hours, and you watched the three hours. There was no button to skip the commercials, fast-forward through the pitching change or jump directly to the ninth inning.

All of this has been on my mind while putting together the Time Capsule on the back page of the Milford Historian. Every month we pick out the big movies, television programs, songs, sports and news of a particular year. It's one of my favorite pages to make.

But I've started wondering whether there's something unusual about the very idea of that page. Look at the back page of this issue. Those aren't simply old songs and television shows. For people who lived through 1973, many of them were part of the scenery. They were playing in stores, coming out of radios, appearing on the television set in the living room and turning up in conversations the next morning. Even the things you didn't particularly like became part of your memory because there weren't a million other places to go.

Now imagine somebody finding a copy of the Milford Historian in 2075.

Suppose that person turns to a Time Capsule for November 2026. We could give them the five biggest songs, five television programs, five movies, the big sports stories and the news. But would that page summon up 2026 in quite the same way?

I'm not sure.

Perhaps the biggest movies would. There are still musicians and sporting events capable of pulling enormous numbers of us into the same room. Shared culture hasn't disappeared.

But the room has gotten awfully big, and it has millions of doors.

In 1973, there weren't many doors at all. That could be frustrating. It could be exclusionary. It gave a small number of people enormous influence over what the rest of us saw and heard.

But it also meant that when somebody opened the door Monday morning and said, "Did you see that last night?" there was a pretty good chance you had. I'm not sure I'd trade what we have now to get that world back.

But every once in a while, looking at that back page, I think I understand why we miss it. ✧



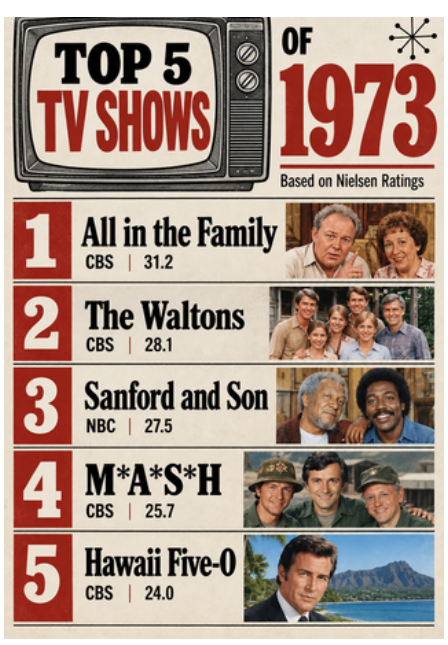
Painting by Addie Luna Bowling.





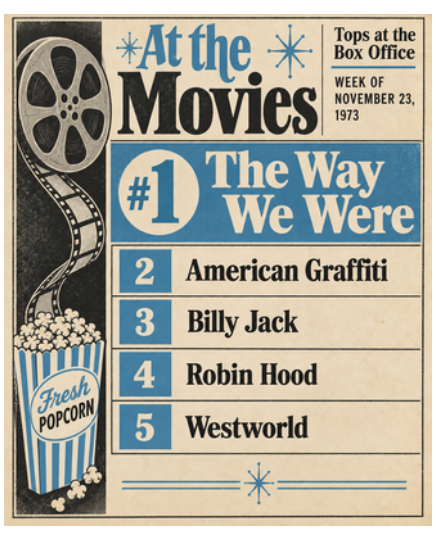


MILFORD TIME CAPSULE • NOVEMBER 1973









It is Friday, November 23, 1973, and America is having one of those weeks when the culture seems to be changing faster than anyone can quite keep track of it.

On the radio, the Beatles are gone — sort of. Three years after the breakup, even Ringo Starr is sitting at No. 1 with “Photograph,” while the Beatles’ old friend Billy Preston is also in the Top Five with “Space Race.” The Beatles had officially called it quits, but the charts apparently hadn't gotten the memo. The band had broken up, but its hold on the pop charts was proving considerably harder to break.

America's reading habits offer an even better clue about the times. The current No. 1 nonfiction bestseller is Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex*. If you've ever heard the argument that much of what we remember as “the Sixties” actually reached mainstream America in the early Seventies, here is Exhibit A: an illustrated sex manual sitting comfortably atop the bestseller list.

Out on the highway, nearly half a million Ford Pintos rolled off the production line in 1973. Detroit was scrambling to answer the appetite for smaller, more economical cars, and the Pinto looked like part of the future. History would be considerably less kind to it. But with gasoline about to become a national obsession, smaller suddenly sounded like a very good idea.

There wasn't much calm coming from Washington, either. Just six days earlier, Richard Nixon had declared, “I am not a crook.” Two days before this Time Capsule date came another Watergate bombshell: the White House revealed that 18½ minutes were missing from one of the subpoenaed Oval Office tapes. Inflation, meanwhile, was running at 8.4 percent. Nixon was still in office, but by Thanksgiving 1973, the walls were unmistakably moving inward.

Even sports seemed to be arguing about the changing culture. Two months earlier, Billie Jean King had faced Bobby Riggs in the much-hyped “Battle of the Sexes.” It sounds today like a made-for-TV stunt dreamed up after a long boozy lunch, and in some ways it was. But more than 30,000 people packed the Astrodome and an estimated 90 million watched worldwide as King won in straight sets. Underneath all the showmanship, the stakes for women's professional sports were very real.

Television offered at least one respite. Archie Bunker and *All in the Family* were still on top, continuing America's weekly argument with itself from the living room. But on November 20, CBS introduced *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*. Peanuts was already a cultural institution, populated by philosophical six-year-olds worrying about loneliness, failure, friendship and the meaning of life — usually while the adults remained conveniently offscreen. Somehow, it fit the early 1970s rather well.

Ringo Starr, Billie Jean King, the Ford Pinto and *The Joy of Sex*. Somehow, it all made perfect sense at the time.





