The Milford Historian

Where Milford's Past Meets Milford's Present

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A Century of Halloweens in Milford

Halloween in Milford is a fairly orderly affair these days. The houses are decorated, the children come out to trick-or-treat after dark, parents follow behind, and Halloween night usually goes off without a hitch. Milford's Halloweens of the past didn't always follow such a set script. Sometimes things got a little wild.

For much of the middle of the 20th century, Halloween came with an understanding that young people were entitled to a certain amount of mischief. Soaping windows, ringing doorbells and other minor acts of torment were part of the fun, especially for teenagers. The problem was deciding where a harmless prank ended and plain old vandalism began. In 1957, the Cabinet devoted an editorial to that very question. "If some things are permitted on Halloween and not others, where do you draw the line?" the editors asked. And how do you make sure that a crowd of "red-blooded boys and girls" will know when to stop?

A reminiscence written some decades later by one of those "red-blooded boys and girls" gives some idea of what they might get up to. "We did the usual soaping of windows, stuck matches in doorbells to keep them ringing, and generally did our best to stay one step ahead of the special police officer contingent on duty at Halloween time," the writer remembered. In one particularly elaborate exploit, teenagers secretly ran a wire from a church bell



Cub Scout costume winners at their Halloween party in 1948. Courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.

into nearby bushes and repeatedly rang it while the police officer stationed at the church searched fruitlessly for the culprits, in a scene that must have seemed straight out of a Keystone Cops comedy.

By the early 1960s, Police Chief Duane B. Rockwell was engaged in what seems to have become an annual effort to keep Halloween contained—not only in its behavior, but on the calendar. In 1963, after declaring that Halloween would be observed Thursday, October 31, Rockwell warned that pranks and the "constant temptation to vandalism" could not be allowed to spill into Friday and Saturday. "Keep it to one night—Thursday—please," he pleaded. Anyone who continued celebrating would find the police taking "a very dim view" of the matter.

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New Monument Recalls Milford's 9/11 Days

There were plenty of things Milford could have done with a piece of steel from the South Tower of the World Trade Center. It could have been polished, reshaped or worked into an elaborate sculpture. Instead, the committee designing Milford's new September 11 memorial decided that the best thing they could do was almost nothing at all.

The steel, from a stairwell in the South Tower, stands much as it was found. Its bends and scars are part of its history, and sculptor John Weidman, who helped develop the memorial's final design, believed there was little an artist could add to them. The committee agreed. "Let the piece speak for itself," said project chairman Jerry Guthrie.

The steel now stands in Milford 25 years after the attacks, mounted on a granite base shaped by Jim Larson to balance the steel and provide room for the memorial's plaques. Its top was deliberately left rough—a reminder of the rubble from which the country had to emerge. The steel will "bleed" over time, allowing the memorial to continue changing with the years. When the committee placed the steel, it oriented the piece toward the North Star.



A crowd gathers on the Oval in the days after the 9/11 attacks. Milford Cabinet photo.

The idea at the heart of the memorial was simple: What if Milford could get a piece of the World Trade Center itself? Jack Esposito, a member of St. Patrick Church, had a family connection to the New York City Fire Department, providing the committee with a way to pursue one. The piece that eventually came to Milford was the section of South Tower steel that now forms the heart of the memorial.

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EDITORIALS

Week of October 26, 2026

History Told the Other Way Around

There used to be a drugstore on the Milford Oval called Dyer's.

For much of the 20th century, Ray Dyer and his family filled prescriptions there, sold everything from greeting cards to school supplies, and greeted generations of Milford residents who came through the door. Today, Dyer's is gone. Like thousands of independently owned pharmacies across America, it eventually gave way to a different kind of economy—one of chain stores, shopping centers and national brands.

So is the story of Dyer's Drugs a story about Milford? Of course. But it is also a story about America. That idea is at the heart of what we're trying to do with the *Milford Historian*.

There is a traditional way of telling history that starts at the top. We learn about presidents and generals, elections and wars, landmark laws and famous speeches. There's nothing wrong with that history. Those people and events mattered enormously.

But history also moves in the other direction.

It happens in drugstores and bowling alleys, schools and factories, churches and town halls. It happens when people change where they shop, how they work, what they do for fun, where their children go to school and how they spend a Saturday night. Multiply those small changes across thousands of communities and eventually they become the enormous social and economic changes that fill our history books.

That's why the history of one small town can tell us so much.

When we write about Dyer's Drugs, we're also writing about the disappearance of the neighborhood pharmacy. When we write about Bowlmor Lanes, we're writing about an era when bowling alleys served as community gathering places.

In that sense, Milford is both our subject and our window onto something larger: what it was like to live in an American town in the 20th century.

And there is another reason these stories are worth telling.

They are remarkably easy to lose.

Lyndon Johnson's papers will be preserved. His speeches, telephone conversations and photographs have been catalogued. Historians will still be arguing about his presidency a century from now.

But who preserves the memory of the pharmacist who knew everybody in town? Or the teenagers who set pins at the bowling alley? Who remembers what children did after school, where families bought their groceries, or what everybody did on Friday night?

Often, nobody thought to record those things for the simple reason that they seemed too ordinary to record. Everybody knew what Dyer's looked like. Everybody knew where people gathered. Everybody knew how life in Milford worked.

Until, eventually, they didn't.

That's the history we hope to preserve in these pages —not instead of the presidents, wars and great events, but alongside them. Because ordinary life is history, too.

And the ordinary Milford of today, however permanent it may seem, is disappearing a little bit every day.



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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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*.

Last month we asked for readers to write in with their memories of the Garden Street and Bales School. We heard from Michael J. Carter who sent us this:

"I grew up in Milford and went to both of those schools in the mid-to-late 1970's. I remember that when I was in the 2nd grade at Garden Street, Stan Trombly of Sunny Prairie Farm gave the students and teachers all a great treat. He drove his truck and cattle trailer right out into the paved area behind the school and brought out one of his Holstein cows and her few-day-old calf, and we all got to pet the calf and learn a little bit about dairy farming. I've got wonderful memories of attending Bales School for 4th & 5th grade as well. My favorite teacher there was Mrs. Pank (5th grade). She loved to teach and she was super kind and engaging. It was a great place to go to school." -Michael J. Carter





61 Years Ago – October 28, 1965

If there is one Milford debate that never seems to go entirely out of style, it is downtown parking. It was an issue in 1951, it remains one in 2026, and on October 28, 1965, the town was once again trying to figure out where everybody was supposed to park their cars.

The Cabinet summed up that particular round of the discussion with a wonderfully concise phrase: "Let George do it!" For those of us who aren't up to date on our '60s slang, there was no George. This simply meant, more or less, let somebody else take care of it. And that turned out to be a pretty good description of the meeting.

Local businessmen had met with the Planning Board at the library, and everyone agreed that downtown needed more parking. The businessmen thought the selectmen ought to take the lead. The Planning Board thought the businessmen should. Milford had apparently found the parking problem. Finding George was proving more difficult.

Fortunately, readers looking for a more ambitious solution only had to turn a few pages. There the Cabinet offered another possibility: a 79-foot Ferris wheel for cars.

"Parking Lots of the Future — Towers Like Ferris Wheels," announced the headline. The Swiss-designed Wulpa Parking Tower apparently could suspend 20 automobiles in cradles rotating around a steel tower, using just 564 square feet of land. Push a button, an empty cradle descended, you drove aboard, and up your automobile went.

Elsewhere, a very different part of the 1960s made an appearance at Town Hall. The Hillsborough County Forest Fire Wardens Association gathered for its annual meeting, where 114 members and guests enjoyed supper prepared by the ladies of the Baptist church. Milford pharmacist Ray Dyer was in charge of the supper, officers were elected, and then the evening took an unexpected turn.

The guest speaker was a State Police lieutenant, and his subject was rather foreign to the good folks of Milford: riots. The previous summer, a large crowd of young people had rioted at Hampton Beach in a disturbance serious enough to bring in the National Guard. Officers were now studying new riot-control techniques at Pease Air Force Base; the old methods, the speaker explained, were no longer as effective as they once had been. To finish the evening, the fire wardens watched a film of the Hampton Beach riot.

It must have made for a strange night at Town Hall: supper, election of officers, and then film footage of thousands of young people battling police. It was 1965. The decade was beginning to change.

The future was arriving in other ways, too. A computer in a White River Junction warehouse was helping keep Milford's Super Save stocked. The store stood on the hill above the Oval, where Governor John McLane's home had once stood and where Rite Aid would later be located. The Cabinet, apparently aware that "computer" still sounded like something from a science-fiction movie, explained

(Continued on page 3)

Calling the Contra Dance

On the fourth Friday of the month, the third floor of Milford Town Hall becomes a dance hall. Fiddles and guitars take the stage, a caller leads the room, and lines of dancers move across the auditorium floor. This tradition, now more than 30 years old in Milford, recently became part of a Select Board discussion over proposed increases to Town Hall rental fees.

At its July 27 meeting, the Board heard from Sandy LaFleur of the Contra Dance Committee, which currently pays $150 for use of the auditorium and banquet room. Board members spoke warmly of the dance's long relationship with the town while also considering whether rental fees adequately cover municipal costs. The proposal was tabled while the Board gathered more information.

So what is contra dancing? It is an old New England cousin of square dancing, but instead of four couples remaining in a square, dancers generally form two long lines, move up and down the floor, and switch partners after each dance. A caller teaches each sequence before the music begins and continues prompting until everyone has found the pattern. As the Milford group's cheerfully blunt welcome guide explains, the caller's ultimate goal is for the dancers to "get it" so the caller can "shut up" and let everyone enjoy the music. The group assures newcomers that mistakes are all part of the fun, adding that "even the caller has been known to miss a call!"

The appeal is not only in learning the steps. Dancers of different generations share the floor, and newcomers do not need to arrive with a partner or any previous experience. "You can literally walk in off the street knowing nothing and you will find folks like you," David Palance said. "When you walk out, you are changed by the experience of welcome and immersion in an old-time culture." In a 2019 account of one Milford dance, writer Dale Cole counted about 20 musicians, some as young as 10, sawing away on fiddles and strumming guitars while children, families, and older dancers shared the floor.



Musicians provide the accompaniment for the Milford Contra Dance at Town Hall in 2026. *Milford Historian* photo.

TOWN HALL
— NOTEBOOK —



Contra dancers take the floor at Milford Town Hall in 2026. *Milford Historian* photo.

That sense of welcome has been part of Milford's modern Contra Dance since its beginnings in December 1989, when early dances helped raise money while the Town Hall auditorium was being restored. The long relationship with the room can still be seen in small details: dancers arrive with clean shoes, and the group keeps special brushes on hand to protect the auditorium floor. The same spirit extends to the music. An 1890 piano donated to the town by longtime organizer and caller Frank Woodward is tuned by volunteers, while the open band welcomes musicians who are still learning the traditional jigs, reels, marches, and waltzes.

None of this resolves the practical question before the Select Board about the cost of renting Town Hall. It does help explain why a proposed change in fees has inspired considerably more feeling than the average discussion of room rentals—and why supporters believe this unusual New England tradition is worth preserving in Milford. ✧

Thumbing the Files October 28, 1965 (Continued from page 2)

that most people associated such machines with "outer space, missiles and rockets, or banking." This one was an IBM data-processing system used to track some 5,000 products, fill orders and manage inventory. Its equipment looked, readers were reassured, no more complicated than an oversized typewriter, while its discs were described as the computer's mechanical "brains." An order placed by 9 p.m. could arrive at the Milford store the next morning. It was a brave new world for Super Save stocking.

Super Save itself was getting into the spirit of the season. "Nothing Spooky About Our Values!" promised a full-page Halloween advertisement, offering, among other bargains, three pounds of sweet potatoes for 25 cents.

Indeed, throughout the paper, there was plenty of evidence that the spooky season had arrived. An estimated 716 schoolchildren in grades one through six were to march in costume from the Garden Street School to the Square, around the Oval, and back again.

Around town, 500 children and adults packed the Wadleigh Memorial Library program called "Science Magic," where a scientist from the Boston Museum of Science turned a potato, drinking straw, hammer and nail into objects of fascination. And the Odd Fellows were preparing for another season of indoor baseball, with Milford scheduled to take on teams from Nashua, Reeds Ferry, Hollis and Wilton.

Parking problems and indoor baseball. Riots and Halloween parades. Milford in 1965 could feel remarkably familiar one moment, and like a glimpse of the future the next.

Though, as it turned out, that future never quite included a 79-foot Swiss parking Ferris wheel. ✧



An IBM data-processing system used to stock Super Save. *Milford Cabinet*, October 1965.

Have a Story Idea?

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**.

The Doris Best Murder

By Matt Bowling

From *On and Off the Oval: Adventures in 20th Century Milford*

On the Bills Farm on North River Road, in the early morning hours of December 5, 1920, William Best woke up his mother-in-law to report that his 21-year-old wife Doris had just killed herself. His story would not be believed by Mrs. Bills — or anyone else for that matter.

Doris Best lay in her bed with half her head blown off by a single-barrel shotgun which was tied to her left foot by a string. When Dr. W.H.W. Hinds and Milford police chief John Monteith arrived at the scene, they immediately concluded that Doris had been murdered. Indeed, her husband wasn't fooling anyone — the string looped around Doris's toe was too short and it was attached to the trigger guard of the gun, not the trigger. William Best was immediately arrested and hauled into the Milford Police Station.

Murders were (and are) extremely rare in these parts and the Milford Police spared no effort. A photographer was brought in to document every part of both the bedroom and the body. Measurements were made, evidence collected, and medical examiners brought in from Nashua and Boston. Meanwhile, throughout Sunday, Best maintained his story, insisting on the suicide. But according to the Milford Cabinet, when Best was questioned again at 5:30 that evening, Chief Monteith posed the question, "Are you sure she killed herself?" to which Best replied that he may have dreamed that part. Then acknowledging that "they would find out sooner than later," he divulged the entire story. While that version of what went down at the station sounds perhaps a bit too pat — however the confession came about — Best was soon on his way to Manchester to await a January trial.

For a small village like Milford, such a grisly murder was big news. Boston editors, believing they had a sensational "mystery" on their hands, dispatched nearly a dozen reporters and photographers to Milford; one paper alone sent three men. Unfortunately for the assembled newspapermen, the "mystery" didn't last long: Best had confessed. The Cabinet could not resist noting that the Boston reporters praised the local police work as unusually thorough and efficient "in a country town."

Motive was much debated. Financial strife could have been a factor. William worked in Hartshorn Mill and Doris in a hosiery factory, and they were living with her parents along with their three-year-old boy, Billy. The Bests had been married four years and were described afterward as having seemed like a "peaceable and reasonably happy couple," though they occasionally quarreled.

Best himself had apparently enjoyed an excellent reputation before the murder. He was not particularly well known in Milford, but he and his family were better known in Laconia.

(*Continued on Page 8)*



Photographs of Doris and William Best as they appeared in the Milford Cabinet.

MILFORD THEN & NOW



Hayward's Trading Post in 1969. Postcard from the *Milford Historian* collection.



Hayward's Trading Post today. Close inspection shows that the building was enlarged through the years. *Milford Historian* photo.

Milford Then & Now: Hayward's Trading Post

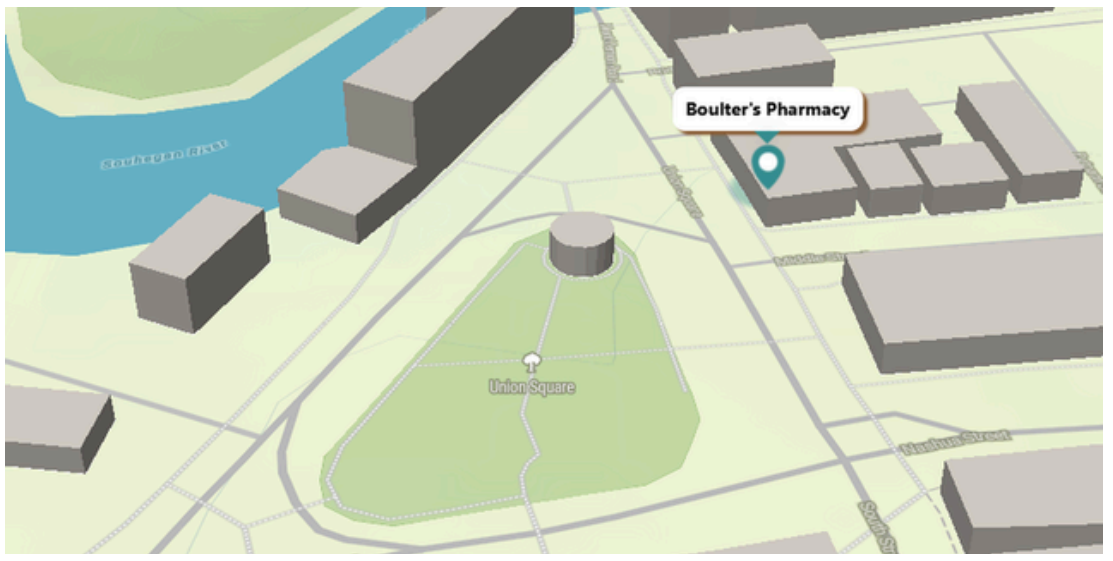
When Hayward's Trading Post formally opened on Route 101 in March 1965, the Milford Cabinet called it "the realization of a dream of Art and Libby Hayward." The new 26-by-60-foot shop specialized in leather goods—Quoddy moccasins, handbags, car coats and gloves—along with furniture and gifts. With a Route 101 bypass then being proposed, Art Hayward said they hoped to create a destination that people would seek out rather than simply pass on their way through town. "We feel we have something that is different," he told the Cabinet. "It will be something extra to attract people."

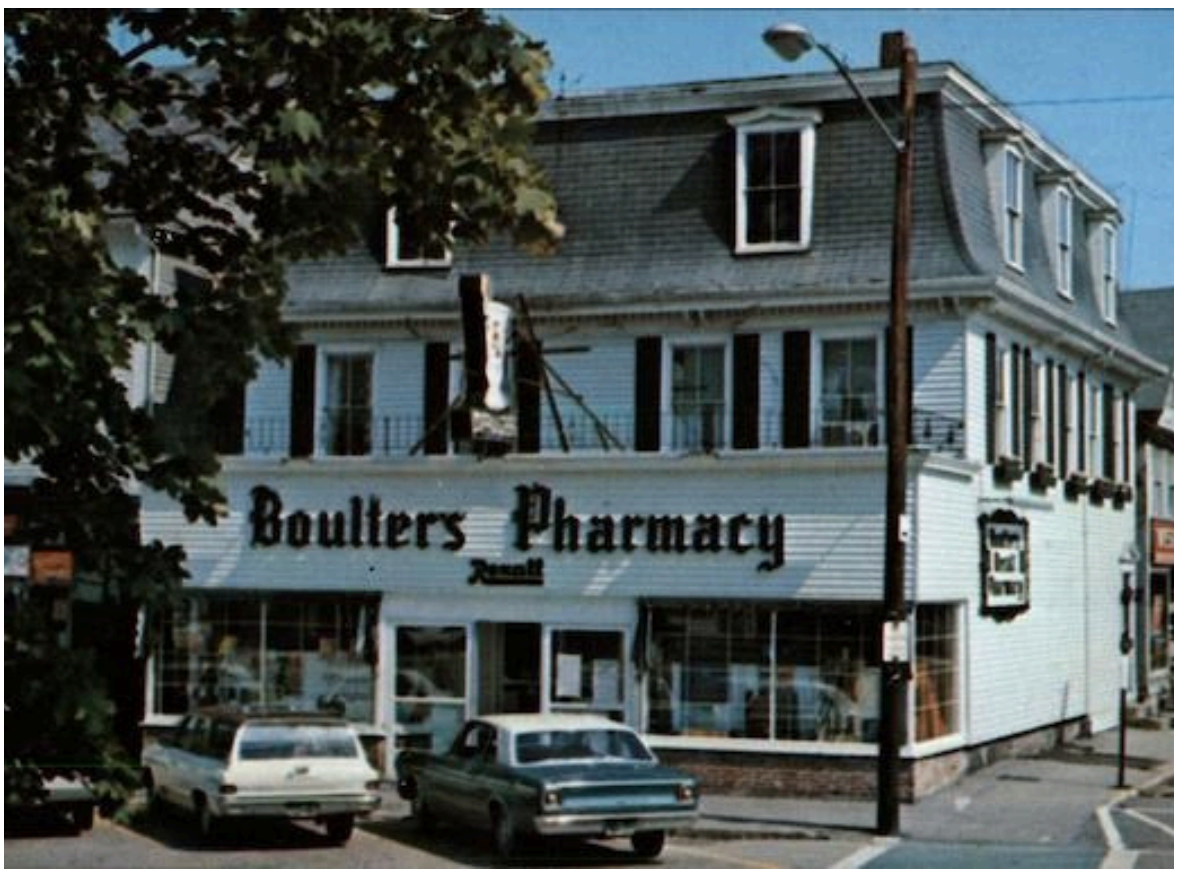
It certainly proved to be. Within a few years, Hayward's was proclaiming itself "The World's Largest Moccasin Shop," a boast that became part of the store's roadside identity. Over the years, shoppers could find everything from deerskin booties and knee-high fringed moccasins to leather coats, Pendleton woolens, handbags and boots. The store also developed into a true country store, offering such things as pewter, candles, cedarware, glassware and even gourmet foods. More than six decades after that 1965 opening, Hayward's remains at 359 Elm Street, still selling moccasins, footwear and leather goods, and still owned by Libby. The little trading post that set out to give travelers a reason to stop has become one of Milford's longest-running and most recognizable businesses.



A 1969 Hayward's Trading Post ad from the *Milford Cabinet.*







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.

Boulter's Pharmacy

For years, Boulter's Pharmacy stood at the corner of Middle Street and the Oval, serving generations of Milford customers. Boulter's was a Rexall store—part of a national network of independently owned pharmacies that operated under the familiar Rexall name and sold Rexall products.

When owner John Bilodeau unveiled a newly renovated Boulter's in the 1960s, the Milford Cabinet reported that some 9,000 people visited during the three-day grand opening—a remarkable turnout in a town of only about 5,000 people. There were games, grab bags and prize drawings, along with hot fudge sundaes served in glasses customers could take home. Boulter's advertised itself as "a modern pharmacy with old fashioned service"—a fitting slogan for an era when the Oval supported two independently owned drugstores, Boulter's and Dyer's Drugs, just a short walk from one another.



1965: Keyes Pool Opens, Quarry Swimming a No-No

In 1965, Keyes Memorial Pool opened its gates and brought an end—officially, at least—to Milford's long era of quarry swimming. The old swimming holes were closed, and a summer tradition tolerated for generations became trespassing. But closing the quarries was easier than extinguishing their appeal. Even today, a quick YouTube search will turn up outlaw videos of youngsters diving from dizzying heights into the dark water below.

For decades before the town had a municipal pool, these abandoned granite pits had served as Milford's unofficial swimming system. As the *Milford Cabinet* once put it, "generations of youngsters learned to swim and dive under conditions that would give any Red Cross lifeguard gray hairs."

There were roughly a dozen quarries scattered around Milford, remnants of a granite industry that had flourished from the late 1800s through the early decades of the twentieth century. Popular swimming holes included the twin pools at the Lovejoy Quarry, the Pease Quarry in South Milford, Tonella's quarries in East Milford and Roberts Quarry near Mont Vernon Road—the last to remain officially open for swimming.

Many operated with the silent assent of their owners, and the attraction was unmistakable. The Nashua Telegraph described "high marbled headwalls 75 feet high variegated with a myriad of changing red, grey and blue patterns." There was deep, cool water below and a granite diving platform for anyone sufficiently brave—or insufficiently cautious—to use it.

The beauty came with very real danger. In July 1958, 23-year-old Richard Paquette of Manchester died after diving from a 10-foot rock, striking a projecting ledge and fracturing his neck. It was one of numerous quarry accidents recorded over the years, both before and after Keyes Pool opened.

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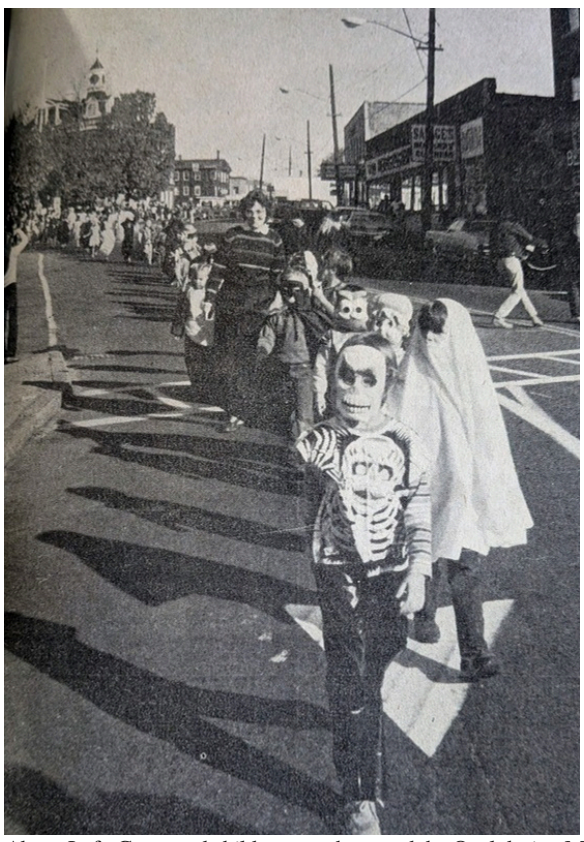
Above: The 1965 opening of Keyes Pool. Milford Town Report photo.





Above Left: Costumed children march around the Oval during Milford's Halloween parade in the 1970s. *Milford Cabinet* photo.

Above Right: Two young trick-or-treaters visit a Milford home in 1954. Courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.



Children gather for an American Legion Halloween party in Town Hall during the 1950s. Courtesy of the Milford Historical Society.



Children parade around the Oval in 2001. *Milford Cabinet* photo.

Halloween Through the Years (continued from Page 1)

By 1965, the rules were more explicit. Trick-or-treating would be permitted until 8 p.m. on October 31st. After that, the Cabinet warned, "Anyone found after these hours will be dealt with by the local police." The newspaper did not elaborate on what being "dealt with" might entail.

BEFORE TRICK-OR-TREAT

Go farther back in Milford's history and a different Halloween emerges—one with plenty of witches, ghosts and goblins, but considerably less concern about what they might do to your property.

In October 1913, The Boston Store, directly opposite the public library, invited Milford residents to "Enter into the Mysteries of Celebrating HALLOWEEN." Anyone wishing to enter those mysteries could purchase crepe-paper festoons and streamers, orange-and-black decorations featuring witches, black cats and pumpkin faces, along with pumpkin lanterns and novelties intended for "tricks and favors."

A year later, thirty friends and neighbors gathered at William Magoun's home on Nashua Street for a birthday surprise arranged as a Halloween masquerade. The house was decorated with crepe paper, witches and pumpkins, with the lights draped in red and yellow. Then the guests began arriving. The Cabinet reported that "at an early hour the witches, knights, ghosts and goblins and other kinds of monstrosities began to gather and by nine o'clock the house was filled with merrymakers."

So Halloween was already well established in Milford; it would simply acquire a little more mischief—and a good deal more attention from the police—as the decades went by.



This little devil was too young to march around the Oval in 1983.

THE SCARES CHANGE

In the early 1980s, the worries surrounding Halloween had changed. The old concern about what teenagers might do after dark was giving way to a fear familiar to one generation of parents: what might be lurking inside the candy.

One letter to the Cabinet in 1985 complained that each October brought renewed "scares about poison in popcorn, and razors in apples, and needles in candy-bars." Some parents, the writer noted, wouldn't allow their children to eat anything until they had "checked it — and thrown out anything not commercially wrapped."

The widespread fear of poisoned or booby-trapped Halloween candy was largely based on urban legend, but the fear was real: in the 1950s and '60s, Milford adults worried about what the children might do to the town; by the 1980s, they worried about what the town might do to the children.

(Continued on Page 10)



Milford's September 11 memorial incorporates a piece of steel from the World Trade Center's South Tower. *Milford Historian* photo.



Participants carry a large American flag during the dedication of Milford's September 11 memorial. *Milford Historian* photo.



Residents and local officials gather for the dedication of Milford's September 11 memorial. Photo by Lise Lewis.

9/11 Remembered (continued from Page 1)

To understand the memorial, it helps to remember what those days looked like in Milford. For one Milford family, September 11 wasn't a distant tragedy watched on television. Pamela Caiado's brother, Robert Hayes, 37, of Amesbury, Massachusetts, was aboard American Airlines Flight 11 when it struck the North Tower. Hayes left behind his wife, Debbie, and two young sons. When The Cabinet spoke with Caiado in the days after the attack, she recalled, "He did not want to take that trip. He knew something was wrong."

By Friday night, three days after the attacks, Milford was doing what towns often do when nobody quite knows what else to do: people came together. More than 200 gathered on the Oval for a spontaneous candlelight memorial. A Cabinet photograph, featured here in these pages, captured Milford resident Payson Adams wrapped in an American flag. Tam Betelak described the scene simply: "It was very powerful. The tone was somber and everyone was hugging."

The impulse to respond showed up in less expected places, too. Edward Jones' Milford office at 1 Elm Street set aside the usual investment pitch to "extend our deepest sympathies to the families of the victims of the terrible events of September 11."

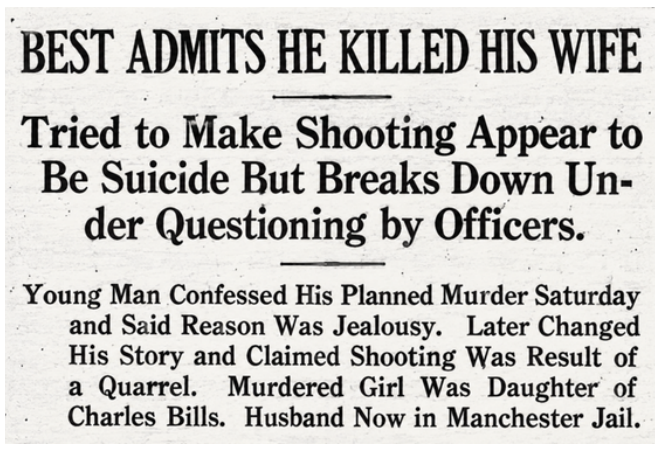
Coming together didn't mean everyone suddenly thought alike. On Monday, September 17, The Cabinet went back to the Oval and asked residents what the United States should do next. Ray Pelchat of Milford said, "I can't see killing millions to avenge the thousands that died, horrible as it was." Mary Eve Passen, also of Milford, saw things differently: "We need to stop being naive about this, and take aggressive action, using both bombing and special forces." Six days after the attacks, on the same Oval where Milford had gathered by candlelight, two residents were already giving voice to a debate the country would have for years.

The Rev. David G. Robinson Jr., rector of Milford's Church of Our Saviour, found another way of describing what had happened. Writing in The Cabinet on September 19, he observed that "for many people time has been divided into 'before' and 'after' by this event."

Twenty-five years later, there are adults who have no September 11 memory at all, and children visiting Milford's new memorial for whom the Twin Towers have always belonged to history. Guthrie believes they are an important part of the reason for building it. "People that are too young to remember this event need to know," he said. Having also worked on Milford's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, he was conscious of how many years passed before veterans of that war received a permanent memorial in town. "We should not have to wait 50 years for the people to be recognized like the Vietnam Memorial," Guthrie said. "People want to have a place to come and remember and celebrate the people that were affected by this event."

One of the new memorial's plaques invokes the phoenix, the ancient image of something rising again after fire and destruction. The idea is repeated throughout the memorial without being shouted: in the rough granite, in the weathering steel and in the decision to preserve rather than disguise the marks left upon it. "Life changes from these major events," Guthrie said, "but we must become better for it."

In the end, what stands in Milford is something considerably simpler than an elaborate sculpture: a piece of steel that once stood inside the South Tower and a town's memories of what happened on one September morning and in the bewildering days that followed. The committee's instinct was to let the piece speak for itself. Twenty-five years later, it has quite a lot to say. ✧



BEST ADMITS HE KILLED HIS WIFE

Tried to Make Shooting Appear to Be Suicide But Breaks Down Under Questioning by Officers.

Young Man Confessed His Planned Murder Saturday and Said Reason Was Jealousy. Later Changed His Story and Claimed Shooting Was Result of a Quarrel. Murdered Girl Was Daughter of Charles Bills. Husband Now in Manchester Jail.

Milford Cabinet headline from the days after the murder.

Doris Best Murder (continued from page 4)

Locals reportedly regarded him "very favorably" and said he had an "excellent reputation." His friends were slow to believe he could have committed such a crime unless he had been mentally deranged or acted in the heat of anger.

Jealousy seems to have been at the heart of it. Best accused Doris of receiving attention from other men and was also worried about financial matters. Exactly how the killing unfolded became less clear as Best changed his story. In his initial confession, according to the Cabinet, he admitted obtaining the shotgun around 5 o'clock Saturday afternoon and planning both the murder and the phony suicide. He later claimed the shooting came during an awful row, after accusing Doris of "indiscretions." When Doris said he was only bluffing, Best said, he fired.

In January, Best pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to life at hard labor at the state prison in Concord. It was all over in just a few minutes, disappointing the large crowd that had gathered for some judicial fireworks. The Milford Cabinet, however, suggested that many townspeople were relieved. There had been considerable apprehension that a sensational trial would give Best an opportunity to air allegations about his wife's conduct in an attempt to mitigate his crime. Instead, the paper observed, "Best is a young man and in good health, and he will have a long time in which to consider his rash act."

That "long time" turned out to be 14 years. Best became a model prisoner, working in the state prison bake shop and compiling what the Cabinet later called a "perfect prison record." People who had known him had periodically taken an interest in securing his pardon, and by 1934 the paper reported a general feeling that, "if not actually insane," Best had been under "tremendous emotional strain" when he killed his wife.

At Christmas that year, Governor John Gilbert Winant and his council granted him a pardon. Best, now 40, left prison and headed for Detroit, where a job was waiting. After 14 years behind bars, the Cabinet reported, he was being given "a chance to make good." For Milford, where murder was almost unheard of, the strange and brutal events of that December night would remain one of the town's darkest stories. ✧

FROM THE FUNNY PAGES

Long before television — and decades before the internet — Milford readers found plenty to laugh about in the pages of the Milford Cabinet. Each month, the *Historian* digs out a comic or cartoon that once appeared in the local paper, offering a little glimpse of the humor, language and everyday life of another era. This comic ran in the Cabinet in December 1920.





LAST ISSUE'S ANSWERS — EDITION 2

Did you get the answers to our "Do You Know Milford?" feature in Edition 2? They were: A: Milford's Reading Children statue on the Oval B: Sign outside Old Souls Barbershop on Nashua Street C: Sign for Big Dog Eats on Union Street D: Belair Studio sign on Nashua Street

Quarry Swimming (continued from page 5)

Still, for much of their history, the quarries were treated less as forbidden danger zones than as a familiar part of summer life. In 1946, Robert Pease attempted to turn his South Milford quarry into something resembling a proper recreational facility, adding a sandy beach, diving boards, changing rooms and even kerosene lamps for night swimming.

The earliest days were remembered as something more innocent—and considerably less clothed. Looking back in 1942, one Cabinet writer recalled, "In the days when the Treasury Building columns were quarried, any kid who tried to swim in anything more than his birthday suit would have been beset by a gang of young savages bent on teaching him the ethics of freshwater bathing."

By the 1960s, rowdy parties were keeping Milford police busy on summer weekends, while accidents and liability concerns became increasingly difficult to overlook. Milford's answer arrived in June 1965 with the opening of Keyes Memorial Pool.

About 150 people gathered for its dedication on Sunday, June 20, only to be driven into the new bathhouse when the skies opened. After reading the posted rule requiring swimmers to shower before entering, one wag observed, "They say you have to have a shower before you can go in the pool, and I'd say we all had our shower."

The following day, 293 children crowded in to test the waters. Admission was free to Milford residents, and so many youngsters arrived that the lifeguards had to double as attendants at the clothes-checking station. Roberts Quarry closed to swimmers that same year, bringing Milford's era of officially permitted quarry swimming to an end.

The quarries, of course, did not go anywhere. Neither did their allure. Keyes Pool may have ended quarry swimming as an accepted Milford institution in 1965, but it could not entirely extinguish the appeal of a beautiful forbidden pool and a very high rock. ✧

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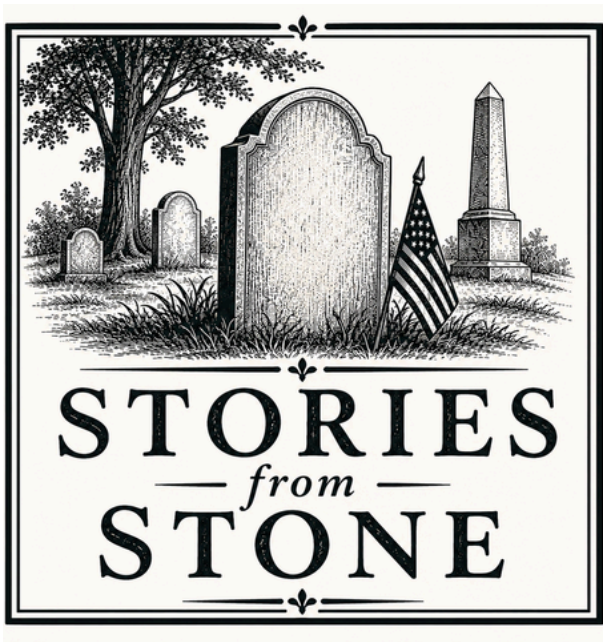

BY DAVID PALANCE

Here is a Milford mystery for Halloween: a hidden stairway, a tomb sealed for nearly a century and, inside, a windowed coffin containing the skull of a woman with long, jet-black hair.

It began in 2007, when workers preparing the site of Milford's Korean War Memorial made an unexpected discovery. As the ground shifted near the wall of the old cemetery, an opening appeared —and beyond it, a stairway descended into the darkness.

Bill Dyer, a lifelong Milford resident, pharmacist and devoted member of the Milford Historical Society, was the natural person to call. Entering the tomb, he found several decaying coffins. One was especially unusual: set into its lid, directly above the head of the deceased, was a small glass window. Looking through it, Dyer saw the skull of a woman whose long, jet-black hair remained strikingly intact.

The chamber was one of five old tombs constructed near the cemetery in 1816—the infamous "year without a summer," when snow was reported in June and killing frosts struck New England. But who was the dark-haired woman beneath the glass?

The plaque identifying the tomb's owners had long since worn away. Fortunately, cemetery records and an old letter from Philip Newfell, preserved among the Historical Society's papers, provided the missing names. The tomb belonged to the Towne family and held Jonathan Potter Towne, his father, Jonathan Towne Jr., and Jonathan Jr.'s wife, Mary Blanchard Towne. The evidence strongly suggested that the woman with the long black hair was Mary.

In the end, there was no ghostly secret or forgotten stranger. The answer had been resting quietly in the records all along. Still, as Halloween approaches, it is difficult to forget that glass window—or the dark-haired woman who waited silently beneath it until the ground finally gave way. ✧







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MILFORD
COMMUNITY
CALENDAR

Oct 30

Trick or Treat on the Oval

3:00-4:30. Milford Oval Bandstand.

Nov 1

Clean Streets Milford

8:30 am. Keyes Field.

Nov 6

Puzzle Palooza

Town Hall Auditorium. Register with Milford Recreation.

Nov 14

Open House - Milford Historical Society

2pm at the Carey House.

Nov 28

Rustic Treasure Shed - Holiday Fundraiser

10-2pm. 786 Elm Street, Milford NH.

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

Halloween Through the Years (continued from page 6)

Today Halloween has changed again. In some ways it is bigger than ever. Houses are decorated weeks in advance, adults join children in dressing up, businesses participate and stores fill with Halloween merchandise while summer is barely over. Like Christmas, Halloween no longer confines itself to a single day; it stretches across the calendar, turning up in storefronts, television commercials, restaurant menus and seemingly everywhere else for weeks beforehand. Yet for all the skeletons and graveyards on front lawns, Halloween in Milford feels considerably less menacing than it did when Chief Rockwell was trying to get everyone home before they thought up yet another prank.

Before we close the book on Milford's Halloweens, there is one tradition worth highlighting. For generations, Milford schoolchildren have celebrated Halloween by putting on their costumes and parading around the Oval. Each October, parents and townspeople line the Oval and shopkeepers step outside to watch. The police still show up to close the streets, but their assignment has changed. Instead of keeping an eye out for "red-blooded boys and girls" with soap and a taste for mischief, they make way for the children to parade through town. Somewhere along the way, Halloween in Milford stopped being a night the grown-ups tried to contain and became one they came out to share with the kids. ✧





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.

Somewhere along the way, Halloween became a very big deal.
It arrives earlier now, and stays longer. For children, Halloween was always a big day, but it was not yet a season. It certainly wasn't waiting for us in the stores while we were still buying sunscreen.

Halloween, it seems, got promoted.

These days, the first temporary Halloween stores can appear before anyone has put away the beach chairs. By October, whole neighborhoods glow orange. Front yards have acquired graveyards, fog machines, enormous inflatable ghosts and twelve-foot skeletons peering over the shrubbery. A respectable Halloween display can now require nearly as many extension cords as Christmas.

The costumes have undergone a similar transformation. Those of us of a certain age may remember the old drugstore variety: a thin plastic costume accompanied by a rigid plastic mask, secured to your head with an elastic string that seemed engineered to snap sometime before the third house.

Today, a trip to a Halloween store is a considerably more ambitious undertaking. There are seemingly acres of costumes, masks, wigs, makeup and accessories, with enough choices to turn virtually anyone into virtually anything. It is also surprisingly easy to enter intending to outfit one child and emerge $60 or $70 poorer.

Halloween has become not merely a holiday but a kind of national theme.

Television shows have Halloween episodes. Restaurants have Halloween specials. Stores have Halloween displays. There are Halloween parties, Halloween dances, Halloween movie marathons and Halloween events that begin weeks before Halloween. "Spooky season" has entered the vocabulary.

Then there is pumpkin.

Pumpkin has somehow escaped from the pie and taken over autumn. It can be found in coffee, cereal, cookies, candles and products that would seem to have no earthly need for pumpkin. I remember seeing a joke online advertising pumpkin-spice motor oil at an Exxon station. It was funny mainly because, by this point, it didn't seem entirely impossible.

In that respect, Halloween has begun to resemble Christmas. It provides a common cultural language that virtually everyone recognizes. Come October, an advertiser need only add a bat, a ghost and a splash of orange to announce that it, too, is participating in the season.

And yet the Rambling Reporter has noticed something curious about all this.

As Halloween has become bigger, it has also become tamer.

The decorations may be more gruesome. Horror movies certainly haven't lost their nerve. But the holiday itself feels considerably less menacing than the Halloween many of us remember.

As the story elsewhere in this edition recounts, Milford once spent a surprising amount of time worrying about Halloween. There were smashed windows, vandalized signs and warnings from the police. Later came the fears about razor blades and needles hidden in candy, and an era when plenty of children did their trick-or-treating while the sun was still safely overhead.

Modern Halloween, for all its skeletons and severed limbs, is a remarkably well-organized affair. There are school parades, downtown events, carefully supervised trick-or-treating and front yards filled with families. The little ghosts wandering Milford's streets are considerably more likely to encounter a motion-activated zombie from Home Depot than an actual Halloween hoodlum.

And for all the easy jokes about $70 costumes and pumpkin-flavored everything, this may not be such a bad development. Halloween remains one of the rare occasions when children dress up as something ridiculous, wander around their neighborhoods after dark, knock on the doors of people they may barely know and are rewarded with candy for doing so. There are worse traditions to turn into a national obsession.
The corporate machinery may have discovered Halloween, but it hasn't quite managed to spoil it. Perhaps that is the oddest part of Halloween's transformation. We have made it bigger, longer, more elaborate and vastly more expensive. We have surrounded ourselves with towering skeletons, artificial graveyards and enough fake cobwebs to ensnare the entire population of Milford.
And somehow, while making Halloween look much scarier, we made Halloween itself a little less scary.





Working on the story of Milford's new 9/11 memorial elsewhere in these pages sent me back through the newspapers to see what was happening here in September 2001. I found it particularly interesting because, while Milford residents were gathering by the hundreds on the Oval, I was somewhere else entirely.

It has been said many times that every generation has a day or two when everyone remembers where they were when the news arrived. For my parents' generation, it was the assassination of John F. Kennedy. For another generation, it was Pearl Harbor. For mine, there is little question about the day: September 11, 2001.

I was teaching second grade.

It was my first year as a teacher at the Agassiz School in Cambridge, and the school year had barely begun. Sometime that morning, the principal came into my classroom with news that was difficult to make sense of. There had been an attack. Airplanes had crashed into the World Trade Center. Something was happening in New York.

The strange thing was that I couldn't do what most adults were doing that morning. I couldn't turn on the television and try to figure out what was happening. I had a classroom full of second-graders and a school day to get through.

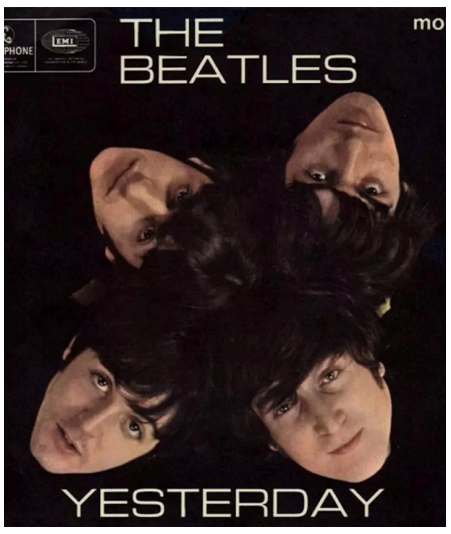
At recess, rumors and bits of information passed among the teachers. A few parents arrived to take their children home. Most didn't. And so, while something almost unimaginable was unfolding a few hundred miles away, we went on with a surprisingly normal day of second grade.

What I remember particularly well is rushing to my car when school finally ended and turning on the radio. Only then did I begin to understand what had happened.

Twenty-five years later, I think that may be part of what makes days like September 11 different from almost every other day we remember. Most of the landmarks in our lives are personal ones — graduations, weddings, the birth of a child, the loss of someone we love. But every so often something happens on such a scale that a national event somehow works its way into our individual memories.

That is why people could tell you where they were when they heard about Pearl Harbor or Kennedy, and why so many of us can still describe an otherwise ordinary Tuesday morning in September 2001.

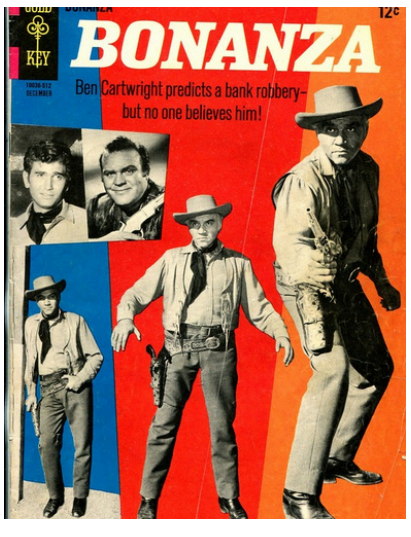














Milford Time Capsule • October 1965

It is the last week of October 1965, and America is prosperous, restless and increasingly preoccupied with a small country on the other side of the world. But there is still plenty to watch, read, listen to—and argue about—closer to home.

On the radio, two bands that will come to define the decade are already crowding the top of the charts. The Beatles are at No. 1 with “Yesterday,” while the Rolling Stones sit at No. 3 with “Get Off of My Cloud.” If neither is your bag, there is always Gary Lewis & the Playboys at No. 5 assuring you that “Everybody Loves a Clown.”

At the movies, The Great Race is leading the box office, with Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon and Natalie Wood embarking on an extravagantly complicated automobile race from New York to Paris. It runs nearly three hours, visits several continents and cost a small fortune to make—which was one way Hollywood liked to spend an afternoon in 1965. Meanwhile, The Sound of Music is still packing theaters months after its release and showing remarkably little interest in going away. The following spring, it will take home the Academy Award for Best Picture.

At home, Bonanza rules television, with the Cartwright family once again demonstrating that owning a very large ranch can produce an astonishing number of problems. And for anyone with a little more time on his hands, James Michener’s 909-page The Source—an epic journey through some 12,000 years of history in the Holy Land—is the country’s bestselling novel.

The biggest sporting event of the month has already produced a finish for the ages. On October 14, Sandy Koufax takes the mound on two days’ rest and shuts out the Minnesota Twins, 2–0, in Game 7 of the World Series. Koufax allows three hits and strikes out ten, giving the Los Angeles Dodgers their second championship in three years.

There are considerably more serious developments overseas. American involvement in Vietnam is rapidly expanding, and from October 19 to 25, American and South Vietnamese forces battle North Vietnamese troops around the Special Forces camp at Plei Me. It is an early glimpse of the much larger war that is coming—a conflict that will eventually consume hundreds of thousands of American troops, divide the country and drag on for years. Back home, opposition to the war is beginning to grow as well, with thousands taking part in antiwar demonstrations earlier in October.

And out on America’s highways, the newly redesigned Chevrolet Impala is king. It is big, broad and unmistakably American, from an era when nobody seemed terribly concerned about how much automobile was really necessary to get one family to the grocery store. More than a million will be sold for the 1965 model year, making it the country’s best-selling car.

The Beatles, Sandy Koufax, the Chevy Impala and Hollywood stars racing around the world. Somehow, it all made perfect sense at the time.

