



Historic Bakersfield News and Notes

BAKERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
A 501(C)(3) NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

2023 COMMUNITY EVENTS

Ongoing: BHS normally meets the second Wednesday of each month at 7 PM in our building. Please call to confirm date, location and time--call 827-3042. Our meetings are open to anyone and everyone who is interested in the history and future of Bakersfield.

BHS building is now closed for the winter. Our building usually re-opens for the traditional Potluck Luncheon on Town Meeting Day, **March 7, 2023**. We do hope that this year will be a "usual" year.

2022 was somewhat less difficult than last year. More events were held including Sugar on Snow, Spaghetti Supper take-out, and Chicken Pie Supper take-out. Independence Day was celebrated this year although more low key than we are used to. There was no parade but there was food and there was music and there were fireworks. All of this was very satisfying after the previous year of deprivation.



The Annual Craft and Bake Sale with Crock Pot Café also took place for the first time in two years.

Wednesday, May 17, 2023: Howard Coffin, 6:30PM

Bakersfield Historical Society will host a Vermont Humanities Council event, a talk by Howard Coffin: 1800 and Froze to Death.

1816 has long been known as the year without summer. Vermonters still call it "1800 and Froze to Death," a year of frosts every month, dark skies, and mysterious lights that caused a widespread belief that a higher power was displeased. In this talk, historian Howard Coffin includes scores of anecdotes on the dark year of failed crops, scarce food, and religious revival. Information: (802) 827-3688.



IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2023

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**Independence Day Celebration,
Saturday July 2, 2022.**

The crowd gathers to listen to music by Rusty Bucket and watch the fireworks at dusk.



Ice cream, pie, maple candy, and raffle tickets to benefit BHS were available.

Arrays of colorful things, practical, decorative, artistic and tasty were available at the Craft and Bake Sale and Crock Pot Café in November.



Craft Fair photos by Amber Foote





What makes a village?

There is the old saying that ...“It takes a village to raise a child.” Bakersfield is such a village. But, what makes a village? It’s not just the geographic location with its buildings but the families that reflect the pride in our community.

One of Bakersfield’s families that have been here for four generations is the family of John and Alice Paquette who came to Bakersfield in the 1950s. Like many of Bakersfield’s residents, John and Alice have their family roots in the Canadian French providence of Quebec. (They were not “Flatlanders”!) They came as a young couple and chose to raise their family of 4 boys and 4 girls here. While living a humble life and meeting the challenges of parenting, John and Alice also spent many hours taking meticulous care of the Town Common, with its flowerbeds and the Maple Grove Cemetery. Initially, the work they did was done with manual tools: shovel, wheel barrel, a push mower, and hand grass clippers. Additionally, Alice worked as the Janitor at the school, Town Hall, and St. George’s Catholic Church. The pride in our community was routinely demonstrated in their care of these town properties. John would often assist Alice with her janitorial jobs in addition to having a fulltime, physically demanding, job at Pender’s Sawmill.

As their children grew up and married, some chose to raise their own families in Bakersfield. They too have donated their time and skills to projects and activities that have contributed to making our village a great place to raise families. Clement coached Little League and helped maintain the ball field. Rosaire helped mow the grass around the Catholic Church and now the Historical Society Building. Both of their families were active volunteers with the Bakersfield Special Concerns Committee. In their youth, the Paquette boys served as Alter Boys at St. George’s Catholic Church. Helen has served on the Bakersfield Fire Department’s First Response Team. They all stepped up to help in the community when and where needed.

Helen’s son Emanuel, as an Eagle Scout, took on the project of creating the signs that welcome visitors and residents to Bakersfield village. These signs are located at three different points of entry to the village.

Clements's grandson, Xander, became an Eagle Scout in 2022. His community project was to organize some of his fellow Scouts to assist the Bakersfield Conservation Committee with starting a pollinator garden. Xander and his sister, Anya, have assisted our Historical Society with fundraiser events on more than one occasion.

Rosaire’s daughter, Diana, has utilized her talents in producing Barn Quilts and donated the finished products to the Historical Society for fundraising raffles.

John and Alice Paquette could never have imagined the impact that their decision to raise their family in Bakersfield would make on our village. The work ethic and pride in our community that they modeled and instilled in their children and grandchildren shines on to this day.

The following article by Sue Tillotson is a brief history of the Bakersfield Historical Society Building. The historical marker for the building will be installed sometime next year.

Bakersfield's reputation as an Academy town was born when the Bakersfield Association for the Promotion of Education began in 1939 with Nathan E. Fuller as its first clerk. The Association, made up of five local trustees, reported "feeling an interest in the improvement of the morals and education of the rising generation in this place, and a need for a suitable place for the growth of genius and intellectual talents, and opportunity for improvement in education and respectability."

Captain Elijah Barnes leased the land and the South Academy, now the Bakersfield Historical Society Corp., was "built by subscription in 1840." The Academy, owned jointly by the Methodist Chapel Society and the Bakersfield Association for the Promotion of Education, was chartered in 1845 as Bakersfield Academical Institute. In 1844 another faction which had wanted the Academical Institution located in the North Village, built another academy on the hill opposite the present Methodist Church.

The South school grew rapidly during the tenure of Principal Jacob Spaulding and his wife Mary Taylor Spaulding, preceptress and teacher. From a staff of three and 122 pupils, there were thirteen instructors and an enrollment of 246 by 1846, 351 by 1848. Enrollment reached an all-time high of 361 pupils in 1850. According to a salvaged receipt, tuition was \$4.00 and books were 80 cents. Students boarded in village homes for \$1.25 per week. The narrow classical curriculum for students wishing to enter college was typical of the times, as we see from catalogs that were saved.

The reputation of the two academies was such that students came from Canada and all parts of New England and New York. To meet

transportation needs, stagecoaches arrived in Bakersfield every evening from St. Albans as well as every day from Waterbury via Hyde Park on "Old Stagecoach Road."

When Jacob Spaulding left Bakersfield in 1852 to go to Barre to take charge of a new academy, the South Academy started on poorer days. Although the principals, Spaulding and Henry Moore, often worked together, the rivalry between the North and South Academies had harmed them both and the competition with public high schools steadily increased. While the North Academy was partially church supported, the South Academy was without support or endowment. Luckily the South Academy was suitable for various purposes, including an indenture between the academical institution and Eagle Lodge Number 67 of Bakersfield for the use of the third floor. The Lodge agreed to pay \$20.00 per year and was privileged to renew the lease for five years.

The census of 1850 shows a population of 1,543 residents, Irish names appear- refugees of the Great Famine in Ireland (1840). French Canadians were also moving in. The 1860 census numbers were lower, 1,451, and included students attending both the North Academy and the South Academy. Midwestern migration and the Civil War were having an impact on the town.

Reverend George Napoleon Cassey, pastor of St. Patrick's Parish of Fairfield from 1860 to 1868, filled with boundless zeal for the propagation of the Catholic faith, led the movement to purchase equity in the lower floor of the South Academy to provide for the needs of Catholics in Bakersfield.

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In March of 1867 the Methodist Chapel Society sold its share of the South Academy. Trustees Jesse K. Maynard and George W. Williams, son of the town's first physician, arranged the transfer to the Catholics.

There is evidence of desire and struggle on the part of the townspeople to keep the old schools, especially the South. The St. Albans Messenger printed numerous letters by the Rev. G. F. Wright, historian for Hemenway's Gazetteer, describing the town as beautiful and interesting, the people ambitious and responsible, and he expressed deep regret that the academies were declining. It appears that for several years there was only one advanced school taught in Bakersfield, sometimes in the North where Mr. Moore frequently taught in his home, or in the South Academy with one or two teachers. Despite the efforts of a brilliant young man, Henry Rustedt, a graduate of U.V.M., who tried to unify the schools at the South Academy, the North community vetoed the plan and the effort was unsuccessful.

Bakersfield's reputation as an academy town likely influenced the townspeople to use the \$30,000.00 bequest of native son Peter Bent Brigham to build a high school instead of dividing the funds among the 13 school districts. The Brigham Academy building was completed and dedicated on Aug. 14, 1879 and offered a strong curriculum that prepared its students for college until it closed in 1966.

In 1885 complete ownership of the South Academy by the Catholics was finally arranged from the Educational Association trustees, J. K. Maynard and J. M. Dean to Joseph Marsett, W. Cook and P. Brady of St. George's Church. The deed includes very little land east and west of the church.

Not much remodeling was done until 1902 when the second floor was taken out to create the sanctuary and dormer windows were added. The old choir platform, just inside the chapel, was removed and the wide entrance hall converted into the present entrance with a room on either side. Between 1924 and 1928 the church was closed, upon re-opening the Mass was celebrated every Sunday until the church was finally closed in 1996. The Ladies of St. George Catholic Church was an active fund-raising organization, its history dating back to the early years of the church, somewhere around 1840. All ladies of the church were considered members of the society and worked together to clean the building, put on an annual Lawn Party, serve a Town Meeting Dinner and in the 1970s they raised money for a new oil heating system in the church.

Although the post WWII baby boom generation had held fast to their parents' loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church and its traditions, significant changes began with societal changes of the 1960s and the arrival of the Hippies around 1970. Attendance at Mass declined steadily for the next 25 years and by 1996 there was sparse attendance and an alarming loss of young men called to the priesthood. St. George's held its last mass in 1996 and the church was deconsecrated. The fledgling Bakersfield Historical Society actively sought the donation of the church and the Diocese of Burlington complied.

The Bakersfield Historical Society building with its beautiful Gothic Revival architecture stands today at the center of the village, listed on the National Register of Historic Places for more than 20 years, a reminder of days gone by and the reverence our citizens hold for history in all its forms.

BAKERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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Vice President: Sue Tillotson
Secretary: Amber Foote
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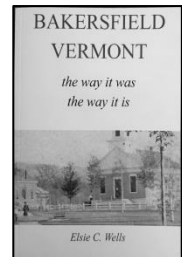
Bakersfield Historical Society
P.O. Box 70 Bakersfield VT 05441
Website: <https://historicbakersfieldvt.org/>
Find us on Facebook:
Bakersfield Historical Society, Corp.
(802) 827-3042

Support Your Historical Society

We depend on memberships, town grants, gifts and fundraisers to preserve our town's history, to heat and maintain our building, for educational programs, community use and much more.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE by Bakersfield Historical Society

- Elsie Wells *Bakersfield: the way it was, the way it is* \$25 (shipping is included) The book is also available for purchase at H.F. Brigham Library.
- Map of Bakersfield Village – reprint of Beers Atlas color \$10



Cut here and send to the Bakersfield Historical Society, PO Box 70, Bakersfield, VT 05441

2023 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

BENEFACTOR \$100 _____ PATRON \$50 _____ FAMILY \$20 _____ INDIVIDUAL \$10 _____

I PREFER TO SUPPORT BHS WITH A GIFT OF _____

Our Restoration Gift Campaign is to help in the restoration and use of Bakersfield's landmark building in order to preserve the past for the benefit of present and future generations

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone _____ Email: _____

The Bakersfield Historical Society is a non-profit 501(C)(3) corporation. Gifts and memberships above the family level are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. You can increase the level of your support if your employer has a matching grant program.

<https://historicbakersfieldvt.org/>