



# 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.

**Tuesday, March 5: Town Meeting Day. 10 am.** There have been a few changes. Voting on the road work budget and general expenses of the town as well as some town officers will be by Australian ballot. All articles for the remaining town offices and for other expenses and special requests will be voted from the floor at the meeting.

**Sunday, March 24: Sugar on Snow Party: 1 pm to 3 pm—** \$ by donation. Our building will open for the season with this end- of-winter favorite. Enjoy traditional fare—local maple syrup on local snow, donuts, coffee, cider, pickles and other treats—Shake winter off your feet with music by Rusty Bucket.

**Wednesday, April 10: BHS Annual Meeting 7 pm** in our building: The agenda includes election of officers, discussion of programs, work on the building and plans for 2024. Everyone is invited and we welcome your ideas.



**Saturday, May 4: Greenup Day 9 am** in the Town Park. This is our annual gathering for spring cleanup of the public spaces of our town including the Town Park and the Common.

**Monday, May 27: Memorial Day, 10 am to 1 pm.** Open House. Recent acquisitions to our collection will be on display. Burial information is available for Bakersfield's three cemeteries: Maple Grove Cemetery, the Catholic Cemetery, and Cook Cemetery.

**Saturday, June 22: Brigham Academy Alumni Meeting and Banquet**

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2024 (SEE PAGE 6)

There are some projects that the Historical Society is pursuing or hoping to conclude this year

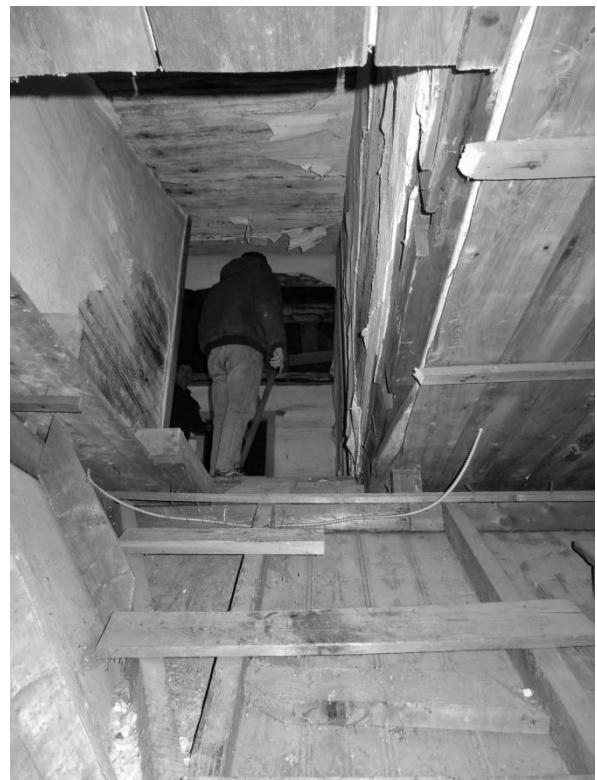
The building sustained some damage to the roof and south window from the wind storm in January so the roof was first on the to-do-list. The cupola needs some attention and a coat of paint. We are actively looking for grants to help this work. Another project, a work in progress, is installing ceiling fans to help air circulation in the summer and adding an outside electrical outlet to have a convenient source of electricity for outdoor events.



We would like to have a safer and more easily accessible entrance to the building's third floor which would be very helpful for maintenance of the building.



The third floor once had classrooms and later was rented out to Eagle Lodge No. 67 of Bakersfield.



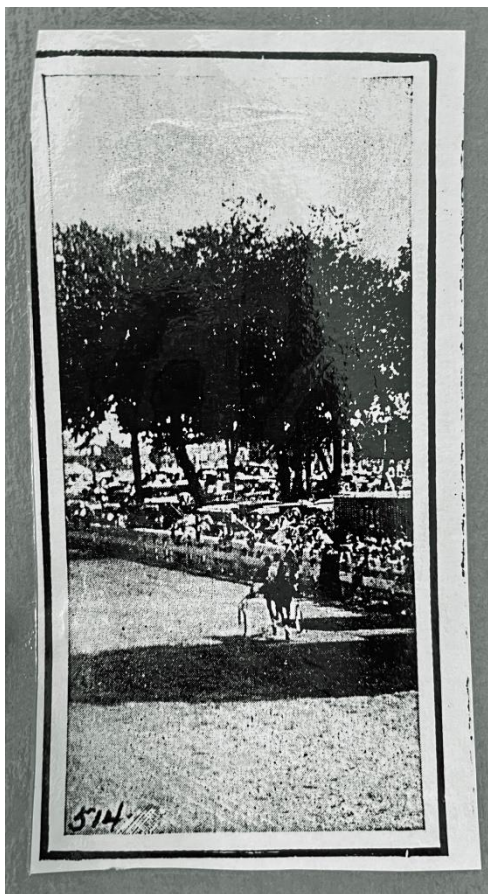
**DID YOU KNOW...** that Bakersfield once had a race track?

In the horse and buggy era it was common for many, if not most, towns to have a “trotting park” for harness racing. Our collection includes an undated, low resolution, copy of a photograph taken at Bakersfield’s trotting park.

This is what Elsie Wells had to say about it in her book.

*1856 The “trotting park” is mentioned in deeds as ministerial land. This was located west of the village beyond the Catholic Cemetery and the gulf.*

*As recently as 50 years ago [late 1920s?] a certain meadow west of the village was known as the “Trotting Park,” although the name “Race Course” is used in **Beer’s Atlas of 1871** map. Trotting parks, as Olive St. John told me, were kept by breeders and owners of horses to provide a place to exercise and train them, and frequently became a place for local or visiting events as well as serving as a race track. I saw my first airplane (not much like a modern one) above and on Bakersfield trotting park where a crowd watched and some folks took a ride. I have a ticket dated eighty-six years ago (1889) to a trotting race in the park.*



Right: a detail of Beer’s Atlas of 1871. The oval in the center between Fairfield Rd. (Rt. 36) and Egypt Rd. marks the site labelled “Race Course”



Right: modern satellite image of the same area with arrow indicating the former trotting park.



## Things you can find out while you're looking for other things

While looking for information about trotting parks or trotting horse associations (nothing for Bakersfield) I found *VERMONT CORPORATIONS: An Index to Private Corporations Formed by the Legislature*, Edited and Compiled by D. Gregory Sanford, State Papers of Vermont, Volume 20, 1987—which allowed a search for businesses incorporated by the state of Vermont. I found these for Bakersfield. The dates given are the years they were incorporated, not necessarily the years they were founded.

**Bakersfield Academical Institution 1844** [known locally as South Academy]

**Bakersfield and Waterville Turnpike Road Co. 1865**

**Bakersfield Hook and Ladder Co. 1849** [our first fire department?]

**St. Albans and Bakersfield Plank Road Co. 1851**  
**Union Institute (Bakersfield) 1854** [Methodist Union Institute known as North Academy]

Waterville Mountain Rd a turnpike road!  
Rt. 36 a plank road! We can only imagine.

Before the 1790s roads were mainly built, financed and maintained by towns. Made with local labor they were harder to build in thinly settled areas. Private turnpikes were business corporations that built and maintained roads for the right to collect fees

Turnpikes generally did not make money but they offered potentially large indirect benefits to nearby merchants, farmers, land owners, and ordinary residents by facilitating movement and trade. Corporations crossing town and county boundaries could bring separate segments together.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed that, excepting those of the South, Americans were infused with a spirit of public-mindedness. Their strong sense of community spirit resulted in the funding of schools,

libraries, hospitals, churches, canals, dredging companies, wharves, and water companies, as well as turnpikes.

By the 1840s many toll roads had reverted to free public use and quickly degenerated into miles of dust, mud and ruts. Short-distance highways were still needed, but taxpayers were increasingly reluctant to fund improvements. Private entrepreneurs found the cost of the best road surfacing material (macadam, a compacted covering of crushed stones) prohibitively expensive. The need for new roads spurred the innovation of plank roads—toll roads surfaced with wooden planks

The simple design with lower cost made plank roads even more attractive. Road builders put down two parallel lines of timbers four or five feet apart, which formed the “foundation” of the road. They then laid, at right angles, planks that were about eight feet long and three or four inches thick. Builders used no nails or glue to secure the planks—they were secured only by their own weight. They built ditches on each side of the road to insure proper drainage

Although plank roads were smooth and sturdy, better in rain and snow than dirt and gravel roads, they lasted only four or five years so the rush of construction lasted less than ten years. Most companies either switched to dirt and gravel surfaces or abandoned their roads altogether. By 1920 the private toll road was almost entirely stamped out.

Elsie Wells says in her chapter “Bakersfield has changed, “The main roads which were gravel are now blacktop. There are still gravel and dirt roads over east and west. There are no corduroy roads.” [but the memory of the plank road was still there.]

Information from “Turnpikes and Toll Roads in Nineteenth-Century America” by Daniel B. Klein and John Majewski—Economic History Association— <https://eh.net>



Elsie Camp Wells was the Bakersfield town reporter for the **Suburban List** newspaper which was published in Essex Junction. These columns capture the minutia and milestones of everyday life in Bakersfield and surroundings: who is visiting whom, what events are happening at schools, civic and religious clubs.

The following was from a column published April 8, 1954

Bakersfield  
Elsie C. Wells, Reporter

Neil Labelle of Reading, Mass., and Huntington Wells of Westford, Mass., were weekend visitors at the Leon Wells home. They came hoping to see

some sugar making. Ray Barnes was just cleaning up after a run. Leon boils for him so they got a glimpse. I have always wondered just what is meant by "an average season." I am told that late years 1200 buckets should yield around 250 gallons of syrup, but folks say that they used to get more. Many people have already made a fairly good crop (in northern Vermont).

My niece, Mrs. Ralph Matthews who lives near Essex Center was in the sugar-stirring business last week. She cooks the syrup to 232 degrees F. both for sugar and maple cream. The sugar is stirred while hot, then poured into 5-lb. cans, but the cream is cooled to less than luke warm then stirred. It is thick at first but becomes cream-candy.

Progressive 4-H Club, Jane Jutras reports: Electric bills were figured from the reading of meters brought in by members. Electric cords were repaired. The club voted to contribute \$10 toward the Camp Ingalls county quota [to help build the camp in North Hero.]

Busy Beavers 4-H Club, Marlene LaCross reporting: Penny Montague and Marlene LaCross will give a demonstration on "How To Make Bread" at the next meeting. The members have sent \$12 to the county camp quota and have given a contribution to the Red Cross. The members had a card party recently to raise money.

For the Native Americans, and later white settlers, usually the main goal was not to make maple syrup as an end product, but to make wax sugar, grain sugar, or cake sugar. All three of these products were made by further processing and evaporating the maple syrup.

Wax sugar is what we commonly call "sugar on snow." It had a chewy, taffy-like consistency that was created by boiling maple syrup until it was very thick and then pouring it on snow. Grain sugar was a soft, granulated sugar similar in consistency to brown sugar. It was made by evaporating syrup to a point that it would crystalize as it cooled. Lastly, cake sugar was made by evaporating syrup to a point that when it was poured into wooden molds, it would harden into a firm block or cake that was easier to store and transport than syrup.

Since most of the syrup in the 19th century was boiled down into different forms of "sugar," the buildings that first began to be used to make maple products in the 1850s were called "sugar houses," not "syrup houses."

From Old-Time Sugaring by Jennie Shurtleff [www.woodstockhistorycenter.org/articles/2021/3/29/old-time-sugaring](http://www.woodstockhistorycenter.org/articles/2021/3/29/old-time-sugaring)

## BAKERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

### Officers 2023

President: Gary Foote  
Vice President: Jerry Brigham  
Secretary: Amber Foote  
Treasurer: Linda McCall

### Board of Directors 2023

Deanna Allen Ann Mittelstadt  
Tami Brennan Joyce LaMonda  
Alice Foote Lisa Stone  
Newsletter Editor: Mary Schwartz  
Website Editor: Amber Foote

## JOIN THE BAKERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

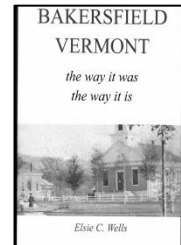
Bakersfield Historical Society  
P.O. Box 70 Bakersfield VT 05441  
Website: <https://historicbakersfieldvt.org/>  
Find us on Facebook:  
Bakersfield Historical Society, Corp.  
(802) 827-3042

### 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



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

### 2024 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. Donations marked "for restoration" will go toward the building restoration/repairs fund and not into the general fund.

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/>