

Norridgewock Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 23 Number 2 Summer 2017

The Norridgewock Historical Society meets at the museum at **7 PM on the 4th Wednesday of the month** from April to November. All are welcome.

Upcoming Programs

July 26 Norridgewock Historical Society's Historic Homes Project Presenter: Nathan Richards, curator

August 23 "Historical Scenes and People of Norridgewock", A slide show from NHS's extensive collection of rare old postcards

September 27 Representatives of the Taconnet Genealogical Library (Winslow) Talk about their collections and services re: Maine genealogy

October 25 Heritage Corn and the Efforts of Area Seed Savers Albie Barden, presenter

Wishing You Bridges

by Julie Drever

We all know how bridges connect us from one side of the river to the other side. We offer our deepest thanks to our two newly retired executive officers : Tom Mickewich for serving as our President and to Reta Theborge for her many years of being our secretary. They have played key roles in the society's efforts to keep us connected between our past heritage and our future as it unfolds before us. Please know how much the society appreciates your efforts and all the work you have done on our behalf.

Editor's note: After shepharding the NHS newsletter for a number of years, Julie has retired. We give many thanks to her for keeping the ball rolling issue after issue!

NHS Wishes to Thank the LaPlante Family ...

NHS has received a number of donations in memory of Lucille LaPlante. The Society wants to take this opportunity to thank the LaPlante family for remembering NHS. We greatly appreciate the support. Some of the funds have been used to plant a flowering shrub in the NHS gardens in Lucille's memory--a bright inclusion in the garden to help us remember a fine, fun-loving person. Reta Theborge said that Lucille, who was her sister-in-law, always considered Norridgewock "home". Her love of the community was readily apparent, too. She was a dedicated member of The Village Improvement Society for many years and a very enthusiastic participant in all of the Eaton School Reunions.



Barr Hatfield

MR. HATFIELD

By Eastman Wilder

We were the worst 6th graders the town ever had. It wasn't our fault. Our school had burned down and now we were stuffed into a 1794 hulk with young teachers from Farmington Normal School. There was no discipline. One noise from the back of the room and the whole class would explode, books would fly, chairs would tip over, the poor teacher's voice would be drowned out. If she left the room in tears, Mrs. Shephard in the next room would step around the sheetrock partition and glare at us. When our teachers quit they were replaced by another one no more capable. *It wasn't our fault.*

Then during one such frenzy a stranger suddenly appeared. He was stocky with angry eyes and a loud voice that drilled right through us. What did we think we were doing! he demanded. For about ten minutes he lectured us, saying over and over we'd be PEENalized if we kept on like that. Then he disappeared as quickly as he had come, leaving us in shock. We could tell something huge had just happened. Later we found out Mr. Hatfield had come to town.

Barr Hatfield was hired to be the town's school principal in the summer of 1945. The school system was a mess. Town energy had been drained by WWII, then losing the 12-grades school to fire that March had meant finding temporary space around town for as many grades as possible. Money was scarce, teaching conditions were awful so good teachers were hard to find. When the previous principal Milton Knowlen found things too much for him, the school board advertised and found Mr. Hatfield in Danforth, Maine, a tiny town in Washington County.

William Barr Hatfield was born in Nova Scotia in 1902. He was Class of '21 in Brewer Me where he was active in music, school newspaper, and sports. After a B.S. from Columbia University he was a "teacher/coach" in Orrington, ME. By 1945 he was school principal in Danforth. Coming to Norridgewock Mr. Hatfield boarded at Mrs. Lunt's in the Sophie May House. Sidney Emmons remembers hearing him going home in late evening, his feet pounding in military cadence after long and full days at school and school functions. He was a true professional devoting nearly all his time to improving school conditions. Barr Hatfield had red-brownish hair parted in the middle. He wore glasses, always a neat jacket and tie, and a striped shirt buttoned a little too tight at the neck. Maybe that explained his habit of thrusting his chin and lower lip upward, like a bull-dog or for emphasis. He was usually serious but he had a good loud laugh too. He sang in the church choir, and he liked to sing for us as he pounded the school piano. What did Barr Hatfield do for our town? What didn't he do! The annual Town Reports show how the school system came out of the dark ages during his 20 years as principal. The 1946 report shows he leapt into action right away. He started a PhysEd program at Hatto Field where the entire school took part. He led marching exercises and calisthenics. He obtained a PA system for radio plays, announcements, and music for "socials". He planned debates, started a chorus, a dramatic club, music lessons, gave awards for best speaker, best speller, best writer in school, had home-room banners for best scholarship, best attendance. Then forgetting about himself he complimented the town on the splendid cooperative spirit of students and faculty. Even the school superintendent said Mr. Hatfield's work had been "noticeably outstanding".

Around 1946 Harold Alfond it seems went to Mr. Hatfield asking if he could do anything to help. Out of that came a moving picture projector, the first of many excellent Alfond donations. The projector was immediately put to use for "audio visual education" in biology, health, social studies, vocational guidance, good posture and grooming, jobs for girls, the meaning of democracy – all subjects that opened new worlds to us small-towners.

Our new "Central Grade School" opened in January 1948, but it was already so crowded that some classes had to double up. Of course it only had classrooms, there was no gym at first. Mr. Hatfield used the KP Hall for chorus singing, the VFW building for "socials". A bus took us to Skowhegan for basketball practice where Gerry Deroche had 40 students using the Skowhegan gym at night. Mr. Hatfield started a Twilight League for teen boys, a girls glee club of 30 voices, a school orchestra. Field trips were made to Superior Court and Maine Legislature and to Colby. And we had a skating rink with lights, shovels, and hockey sticks.

Not everybody in town approved of so much extracurricular activity. Some thought the principal was neglecting proper education and ought to be fired. One day as Mr. Hatfield lead a group of students through Monument Square a man snarled from a car window "That's the way you larn 'em, is it!" Later Mr. Hatfield told us "That man was ignorant." He very well understood the need for the 3 R's, but his larger aim was to develop students mentally, physically, socially and spiritually; to have them learn to think independently, discover their interests, and prepare to compete in complex society. He knew he was right, and the forward-looking School Board backed him. Mr. Hatfield stayed.

"War babies" were crowding classrooms everywhere. Some classes had 40 to 50 students. A visit from a state official found we had 400 pupils and only 10 teachers, today an unbelievable student-teacher ratio. "The principal is being asked to do too much, an impossible situation. He can't possibly do his job." Indeed Mr. Hatfield himself was in charge of the 9th grade with 32 pupils in addition to managing the whole school. Yet he kept on with what he had to work with, stressing the need to allow each student to do its best without hampering others in the crowded classrooms. Constantly Mr. Hatfield aimed for student development, saying if any one of mental, physical, spiritual and social abilities was lacking, the result was Failure.

By 1955 more teachers had been hired including a teacher for music theory, part singing and instruments. A school secretary freed Mr. Hatfield to do more supervising. Norwoc Shoe donated a stainless sink, large freezer, and refrigerator to the new school cafeteria and also underwrote dental check and eye check programs.

More rooms were added onto the school building so by 1957 each grade had its own classroom. And the Principal was no longer in charge of a home room; he could at last do school oversight and planning. Mr. Hatfield said school was going 40% better than any year yet in the new school. Looking ahead he said "The entire town is grateful to Norwoc Shoe" for all its donations, adding "A gym too would be a real asset but would cost \$40,000."

In 1959 Harold Alfond donated the new gym. It was immediately used for PhysEd, music practice, chorus, an all-school Christmas program. A big Spelling Bee involving all 5 towns in the school Union was held in the gym. Parents in town were becoming more understanding and more involved in student development, and a PTA formed. A donated TV was used for career programs showing how to apply for a job, and it also let the whole school watch an address of the president of the United States.

By 1960 classes were crowded again, but the gym and cafeteria allowed helpful rotation. The school now had 3 pianos, a slide projector, a tape recorder, a 70-voice chorus, 4 basketball squads, even cheerleaders. The school was hosting sports games with other towns, winning 7 out of 10. Sophomores, juniors and seniors who were finishing school in Skowhegan and Madison were doing well, clearly a credit to Central Grade School and to Mr. Hatfield's staff.

Always a sports enthusiast, Mr. Hatfield had looked at the empty field west of the school and dreamed of it becoming an athletic field. In 1962 Mr. Alfond donated the field, now "Hatfield Park". Ever grateful, Mr. Hatfield said the athletic field greatly enhanced the school by encouraging fine teachers to come to Norridgewock.



By 1964 the school had 410 students. Barr Hatfield had seen it grow from wretched conditions in 3 ancient buildings to a modern building with almost every facility, with up-to-date teachers and a full program. But now several towns in the area were considering combining into a new modern school district. It would mean financial advantages to the towns, a wider variety of course offerings, more professional teachers. But it would also mean less independence for the principal, less opportunity to create the changes he believed important and less satisfaction in seeing them succeed. So after about 20 years of outstanding accomplishment, our Mr. Hatfield decided to retire.

In 1950 Barr Hatfield married Eloise Macomber of Farmington, Extension Agent for Somerset County. After he retired in 1964, Barr and Eloise moved to Penny Farms, Florida where he died March 15, 1996 at 93. Eloise died there 6 years later.



Eaton/Norridgewock High School Alumni Reunion



NHS salutes Eaton School/Norridgewock alumnus. This year's reunion will be held July 29. We hope members will schedule some time to visit the museum on Saturday and will encourage others to visit, too. Our collection includes a wide array of school memorabilia/ pictures. The Museum is open from 10 to 1.

Photo Gallery

We encourage all our members to come visit the Museum sometime this summer. Have guests/visiting relatives? Grandchildren? Bring them to the museum! Here are some items to enjoy at the museum. Open Saturdays 10 to 1 or by appointment.



Norridgewock Historical Society Officers

norridgewockhistsoc@gmail.com 634-5032

President	Rebecca Ketchum
Vice President	Donna Mickewich
Secretary	Valerie Sirois
Treasurer	Eastman Wilder
President Emeritus	Tom Mickewich
Curator	Nathan Richards

Reminder Notice: Time marches on! Please help support the Norridgewock Historical Society. If you haven't already done so, please mail your 2017 membership dues of \$10 to:

Norridgewock Historical Society
PO Box 903
Norridgewock, Maine 04957


If you have questions for the editors or would like to submit an article, please contact Becky Ketchum at:

norridgewockhistsoc@gmail.com Phone # 634-5032




Norridgewock Historical Society
PO Box 903
Norridgewock, Maine 04957

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