

GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Volume 37 Issue 2

Groton, Vermont

Summer 2025

Inside Look...



2024 OFFICERS

President Deborah Jurist
Vice President ... Brent Smith
Secretaries Sarah Spira,
Phyllis Burke
Treasurer .. Susan Pelkey Smith
Directors Patrick Ayer,
Allen Goodine,
Louise Reynolds
Newsletter
Editor Louise Reynolds
Website
Editor Terry Miller
Genealogist ... John Willard Benzie

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All Members are Invited to the
GHS Annual Meeting
Saturday, August 2nd, at 9:30 a.m.

James John Benzie 1893-1975

A brief history of my Dad

JOHN WILLARD BENZIE

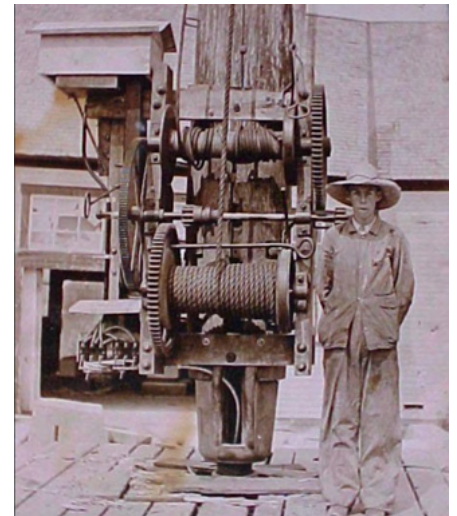
My father, James John "Jim" Benzie delivered mail on an RFD (Rural Free Delivery) mail route from the Groton, Post offices for 50 years, from 1913 until 1963, when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70 for civil service employees at that time.

He was born in Barre, to John (1856-1930) and Mary (Tawse 1858-1941) Benzie, who immigrated to the United States from Aberdeenshire, Scotland in 1878 and 1889 respectively. We always celebrated my father's birthday on the third of April, but a letter from the Barre City Clerk's office states the date of his birth was "Mar. 3, 1893." Cheryl Ann (Carpenter) Strockhoff (1956-2012), the granddaughter of my Dad's sister Corrine Mans (Benzie) Carpenter (1895-1979), told me their family story was that her grandmother changed birthdays with my father because she wanted a more colorful birthstone than April's diamond. She was going to send me a copy of her grandmother's birth certificate that shows the April 3rd date, but she died before she was able to send me the birth certificate.

The mystery remains.

My Dad attended the Groton village school and graduated in 1909 from the two-year high school program that that was in place at the time. He then attended Albany Business College, studying accounting for two years. He was employed for a short time at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit before returning to Groton, where he started work as a substitute mail carrier in 1913. He was soon appointed to a full-time position.

When he was not delivering mail as a substitute carrier, in 1913 until his full-time employment, he worked



Jim Benzie, the author's father, worked for his father's granite manufacturing business at one of his three stonesheds in Groton. He's pictured here at age 20.

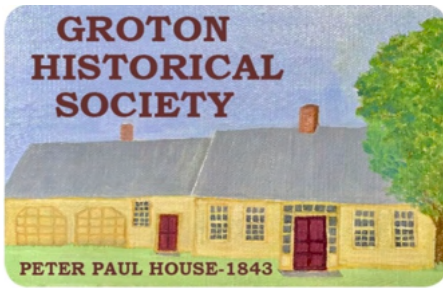
for his father at the M.T. BENZIE & CO. granite manufacturing business in one of the three stonesheds in Groton. They were located on the north side of the M&WR railroad tracks, east of the railway station and the two grain stores, For-All and Park & Pollard.



Jim Benzie used this sleigh to deliver mail in the winter from the time he started with the Postal Service until the early 1920's. The sleigh is now in the garage at the Peter Paul House.

The mail was delivered by horse and sleigh, or wagon, when he first started in 1913, until he purchased his first automobile. My Dad bought a Model T Ford in 1915 for \$515.00

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President's Report Summer 2025

When the Dust and Discover clean-up crew came to the Peter Paul House in May, the house got a deep clean like never before. This team was SERIOUS! They turned over rugs, dusted individual items removed cobwebs from every corner.

A special thanks to members Jen Gaiss, Dwaine Smith and Dawn Evans.

Allen Goodine and Brent Smith really dug in and moved the mail boxes, the mail sleigh, and the Henry Goodine Barber chair. They hung signs, and the pump log, a cast iron bridge plaque from the old Powder Spring bridge. Then we discovered the Groton Railroad Station bench under piles of old town reports! I hope everyone gets a chance to visit with someone on this bench. It is so comfortable.



The garage got a complete makeover, with new displays about the Blue Magic Manufacturing Company, the Page Chain Company, which operated out of the Square Front Garage, Bobbin Mills, and the Weld Axe Co.



Signs for many items throughout the house have been updated with new information and a design that makes them easier to read.

The Vermont State Archivist visited in March and produced a thorough report suggesting several options for protecting and recording the collection at the Peter Paul House. We have already acted on several of those, including replacing a window shade, and installing UV filtering film on some of the back windows. We hope to do more work throughout the year.

Respectfully,
Deborah Jurist

**All Members Are Invited
to the
GHS Annual Meeting
on
Saturday, August 2nd
At 9:30 a.m.**

Agenda

Call meeting to order

- Approve minutes for 2024 meeting
- Treasurer report

Election of Officers

President: Deborah Jurist
Vice President: Brent Smith
Treasurer: Susan Pelkey Smith
Secretary: Sarah Spira
Director and Newsletter Editor: Louise Reynolds
Director: Allen Goodine
Director: Patrick Ayer

Discussion

- Collection
- Signage
- Window coverings

Short talk

Groton During the Depression,
by Deborah Jurist

GHS Open Houses

The Peter Paul House will be open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the first Saturdays of the month, starting in June.

Upcoming Open Houses

August 2nd Annual Meeting

September 6th (tbd)

October 4th, Fall Foliage Day:

Come by to learn about metal detecting!

What's New?

Learn about what's happening at the GHS through our new events calendar, posted on

www.grotonvthistory.com

You can link to the calendar directly at

<https://www.grotonvthistory.com/ghs-calendar/>

Groton Gremlins Win Pride of Place in New Exhibit



Thanks to a thoughtful donation from Lawrence Daniels, we've added to our collection of Groton High School sports uniforms and memorabilia. Lawrence donated twin brother Loren's GHS baseball uniform, glove and the winning ball that was given to Loren by the baseball coach on September 26, 1957. The score was:

Groton 7 McIndoe 6.

Lawrence hit the winning run.

The uniform had been in a trunk with Loren's prized possessions at the Daniels' home place in West Groton, where Loren lived his whole life. Lawrence, asked where his uniform might be, replied, "I think we were supposed to give them back."

You can learn more about the uniform by watching the video of a conversation between Lawrence and Allen Goodine:

<https://www.grotonvthistory.com/oral-histories/>

Vermont Metal Detectorist To Speak at the GHS for Fall Foliage Day Oct.4 at 10 a.m.



Detecting Enthusiasts and Curious Onlookers

Join the fun at the Peter Paul House at 10 a.m. on October 4th as Phil Mandolare, known to fellow detectorists and online followers as "Mud Dog Mandy," presents a workshop on his craft. You might remember Phil from the article in the most recent issue of the GHS newsletter. If you missed the article, check out his YouTube channel.

Phil will begin with a presentation on metal detecting and a demonstration on how the equipment works. He'll offer some research strategies for identifying possible sites and share some of the "finds" he's discovered. He'll take questions and is happy to talk with other detectorists.

Then he will search some sites around the Peter Paul House.

If you have a metal detector, please bring it—all are invited to try their luck at discovering what buried treasure might be under our feet.

Kids, you're welcome to try detecting too! There just might be something out there in a special section of the lawn...

Note: If you'd like to participate, please come with a small garden shovel and whatever tools you like to use.

All artifacts discovered will become the property of the Groton Historical Society, unless released by a GHS Director.

97th Annual Whitehill Stonehouse Reunion Community Welcome!

On Saturday, August 16, 2025, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., the Whitehill Home and Library Association invites community members to attend our 97th Annual Reunion. As we approach our 100th Reunion in 2028, we are seeking input into the vision and use of the Stone House and property. We would love for you to participate in this conversation! We will be leading a brief visioning activity to brainstorm ideas about how our historic building can benefit the surrounding communities.

And while you are here, we also invite you to join us for a potluck lunch, lawn games and tours of the house and grounds. The Stone House is located at 78 Stonehouse Drive in Ryegate. We look forward to seeing you!

The Whitehill Stone House was built in 1808 by James Whitehill. James, his wife, Mary, and their six children left Scotland in 1798 on a stormy Atlantic voyage. They arrived in Montreal, then traveled to Ryegate via the St. Lawrence River and then the Hazen Road, arriving in late May.

They built a log cabin on the property. James' brother Abraham and his family arrived two years later, moving into a log cabin built for them by James and his family. James and Abraham built stone houses in 1808 and 1812 as replicas of the Scottish crofts (farmhouses) they had left behind in Scotland.

The House is the oldest surviving structure in Ryegate and has been owned by the Whitehill Home and Library Association since 1928.

“James Benzie” cont.

Jim Benzie modified his 1915 Model T Ford to carry the mail and equipped it with Page chains for both winter and mud season use. He also purchased a Snow Flyer Conversion Kit so he no longer had to use the horse and sleigh in the winter and could rely just on the Model T.

from James Frost, the Ford dealer in Groton. Henry Ford promised customers a refund if he sold his millionth vehicle that year, and my Dad received a \$100 check from Ford Motor Company early in December, much to his delight. His total earnings that year were about \$500, so it was a huge gift.

After a number of seasons using the horse and sleigh in the winter and the Model T when there wasn't enough snow to use the sleigh, he purchased a Snow Flyer conversion kit so he could use the Model T all year. The kit consisted of a pair of skis to replace the front wheels, an axle to bolt on the middle of the frame and hold the front wheels, and a set of half tracks to go over the rear drive wheels and the idle wheels in the middle of the frame.

Roads were rolled to pack the snow and make travel easier for the horse and sleigh. But this caused the mud season in spring to be extended much later. The high clearance of the Model T and the availability of Page Chains helped both in the winter and in mud seasons. According to the Groton Town Reports, the last year anyone was paid to roll the roads in Groton was 1929.

In the 1930's, when the roads were being plowed and some highways were being paved, he stopped using the skis and half tracks, but continued using the Model T for the mail until he purchased a 1936 Studebaker from Norman Achilles, the Studebaker dealer in Groton. Norman operated a garage and gas station, along with the dealership, at the present Peter Paul



The author, wearing a Groton Gremlins letter jacket, poses with his father's 1936 Studebaker. That car replaced the 1915 Model T.

House, home of the Groton Historical Society.

My Dad drove the Studebaker for a few years until my Mother was called back to teaching because of the teacher shortage during WWII. He then purchased a 1929 Model A Ford from Jimmy Jacobs, a used car dealer in Barre, to deliver the mail. After my Grandfather Peck died in 1946, he used Grandpa's 1929 Plymouth for his deliveries. My Grandpa Peck had trouble starting his 1929 Plymouth in the winter, but he solved the problem by changing its carburetor to one from a Ford Model A.

Over the years, my Dad tried many schemes to start his vehicle easier in the winter. He had an electric dipstick to keep the oil warm overnight and an electric hot plate to keep the battery warm. Sometimes he put an electric light bulb under the hood and covered the hood with the buffalo blanket that he had used in the sleigh to keep himself warm. In the sleigh he also used a charcoal foot heater with the buffalo blanket to keep warm.

He drove the 1929 Plymouth until sometime in the 1950's, when he purchased a station wagon in St. Johnsbury that he used until his retirement in 1963. He drove the station wagon on a trip in 1959 with my oldest sister, Ina (Benzie) Boucher (1929-2008) and her children Jimmy, Mary, Debbie, and Bernie. They visited us in Harvey, Michigan, a suburb of Marquette, in the Upper Peninsula. My youngest sister, Janet, and our niece Charlene flew to Marquette and rode back to Groton with them.

On their trip home, the group crossed the Mackinaw Bridge to the Lower Peninsula of Michigan and stopped at the border of Benzie County for a picture of Dad standing by the sign "Entering Benzie County." Continuing on to Detroit, they visited the Ford Museum so Dad could reminisce about his first job with Henry Ford after graduating from Albany Business College.

Dad and Mother never had very many vacations when we six children were growing up, but they attended Rural Letter Carriers Association mee-

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"James Benzie" cont.

tings faithfully, as he was very active in trying to get the roads improved, especially in the spring mud season.

Dad served one year as President of the Vermont RLCA and Mother as President of the ladies Auxiliary. They were the Vermont delegates to three national conventions in the late 1930's in Columbus, Ohio; Portland, Oregon; and St. Louis, Missouri during their terms as Vice President, President, and Past President.

Both Dad and Mother were also active in the Methodist Church, Grange #443, the Wells River Valley Fair Association and the William Scott Memorial Committee in Groton. The Grange sponsored annual Farmers Day Fairs in the 1920's, but ended them during the Great Depression in the 1930's. So, a group of members who wanted to bring back the fairs recruited a number of other local citizens and formed the Wells River Valley Fair Association.

The group purchased the field at the junction of U.S. 302 and Hays Road, where Northeast Log Homes is now, and built an exhibition hall to display farm products. The hall was also used by the Grange to hold their meetings. During the period when the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) worked in Groton, the Association sponsored dances on Saturday nights to raise money for the fairs. The fairs were halted during WWII, and the Association sold the property to John French, who converted the dance hall into a bobbin mill.

The Grange also recruited others in town to form the William Scott Mem-



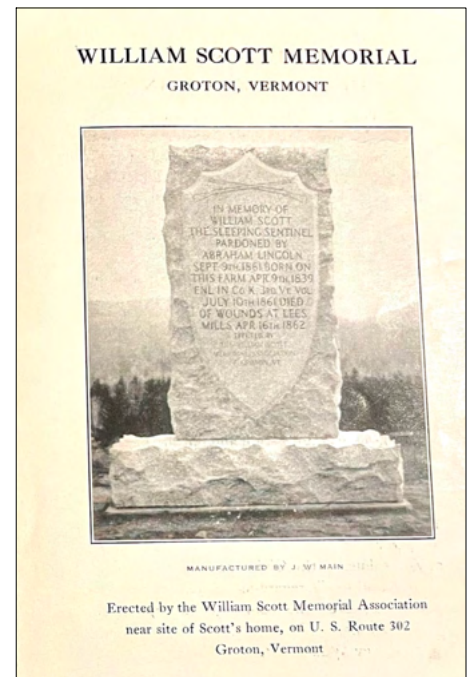
This is the 1929 Model A Ford Jim Benzie used to deliver the mail in the late 1930's and early 1940's, when gas was rationed during WWII.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, he drove this 1929 Plymouth. Here he's shown (on the left) with mail carriers Roy Hanchett (middle) and Walter Main (right). After the Plymouth, Jim Benzie purchased a station wagon, which he used until his retirement from the Postal Service in 1963.



orial Committee in order to raise funds to erect a monument recognizing President Abraham Lincoln's pardon of Pvt. William Scott during the Civil War. Several prominent biographers of President Lincoln were claiming the pardon never happened, and the committee wanted to be sure it was written in stone for future generations. Waldo Glover had researched the stories and found evidence the story was true.

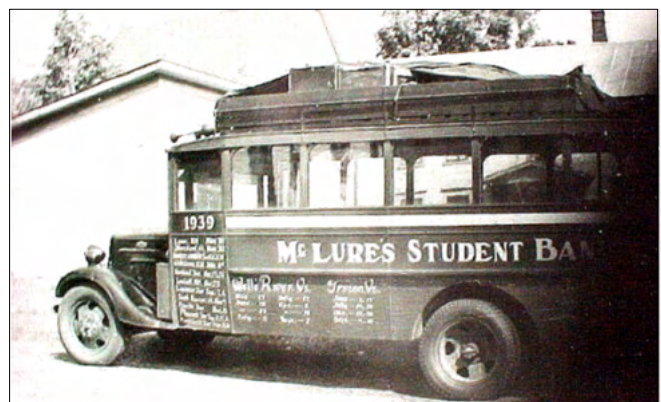
The committee raised the necessary funds and commissioned Jim Main to manufacture the monument at the stone shed in Groton. The Groton Town Representative to the State Legislature in Montpelier, Mrs. Nellie Jeffrey, introduced a resolution to name U.S. Route 302, from Montpelier to the state line in Wells River, the William Scott Memorial Highway. The legislation passed, and McLure's Student Band played at the dedication of the monument.



This photo is taken from a pamphlet commemorating the monument dedicated to the recognition of Abraham Lincoln's pardon of Pvt. William Scott during the Civil War. Scott, who fell asleep on guard duty, was known to the public as "The Sleeping Sentinel."



After the Wells River Valley Fair Association sold its exhibition building to John French during WWII, French built a mill for turning bobbins. The original building burned; this one was built on the same site.



Author Willard Benzie played in the McClure's Student band. They played at the dedication of the Scott memorial in 1947, eight years after this photograph was taken, and a year after Willard graduated from high school

A “Day in Our Village” Event Celebrates Groton’s Strength: Its People

Sometimes you just can’t wait for an event to become history; you have to throw down a marker and memorialize it in the moment.

LOUISE REYNOLDS

Despite chilly, unsettled weather Saturday, June 28, upwards of 100 people turned out to celebrate “A Day in Our Village.” The event, a first for the town, was organized by the Groton Free Public Library and Library Director Sarah Spira.

Spira wanted the celebration to have a festive, block party feel, “an opportunity for neighbors to meet neighbors,” she said, and “for new arrivals to connect with each other and all of the organizations that work within the community.” Her idea was to showcase “what makes living here so special.”

More than 35 organizations supported the event. The Groton Fire/Fast

Department, the First Baptist Church, the Groton Historical Society, the Methodist Church, and Re-Treasured Community Closet held open houses. Other organizations staffed information tables in the Community Building and the Library.

Kids could decorate free bike helmets, donated by means of a community grant from BlueCross BlueShield Vermont. At the Fire Department, they could enjoy Touch-a-Truck Storytime with Ms. Gail, the Director of the Bradford Public Library. Parents could get a safety check for car seats.

Everyone could enjoy crafts and activities like face painting and build

your own “disaster relief kit.” Anyone could eat a pickle on a stick and a hot dog, spin wooden tops at the Library, wrap a red boa constrictor around their neck and watch Marko the Magician turn a young boy into a human piggy bank.

Spira was happy with how the event went. “It all gelled. It fell into place. It felt natural,” she said. “A lot of people participated in the execution of the event. Every individual in the community has a gift to offer the community. I asked, and they were able to help.”

She hopes “A Day in Our Village” will become an annual Groton tradition.



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“A Day in Our Village”



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