

**The Oldest Cabin in Windham County
Was 110 years old in 1899**

"Up the side of a lonely mountain, Robert Jenison with his ax, dog, and gun found his way at the close of the Revolutionary war, in which struggle he had participated, and began the construction of a log house. Mr. Jenison was encroaching upon the home of the wolf, catamount, and bear, and more than once he was obliged to flee to his cabin to escape conflict . . ." (VT Phoenix 10/9/1899).

The cabin was about 24 by 30 feet with three rooms. The chimney was made of field stones and the two doors had heavy wooden latches with genuine latch strings. When these strings were pulled in, the doors were effectively locked.

The cabin was owned by Selim Jenison of West Townshend in 1899, to whom it was left by Warren Jenison, his father. The cabin was situated in the town of Jamaica, just over the West Townshend line. By 1860, Mr. Jenison lived in the village, and the building was no longer used as a year-round residence. However, Mr. Jenison still farmed the land in the summer, and kept his stock in the barn nearby. Florence Lawson's scrapbook gives us an image of the Jenisons passing by in the early days on "a load of goods with oxen - Selim was driving and Betsey sitting on top of the load with a corn cob pipe."



**My Job in Brattleboro 1850-1855
Memories from Charles Gray Atwood, Part VII**

Eliza went to Brooklyn to school with the other girls about this time; and I got a position in Wheeler's store in Brattleboro. It was definitely a dry-goods store only. I thought it a big raise, but I slept in the store, did the sweeping and other dirty work, just the same. I boarded with a Mrs. Thompson. Table-board, I mean, and got good food. There was a "water-cure" across the street. One of those faddy places which were springing up all over at that time. From them I got the notion of taking an ice-cold bath every morning; and it nearly killed me. Didn't get over it for years.

I made many nice acquaintances in Brattleboro, and I had a good time. Once a month, I went home on the stage. This stage left Brattleboro at six in the evening; drove to Dummerston, and changed horses. From there to East Townshend, and then it got to West Townshend at nine - in time for bed. I always enjoyed that ride - fine horses, a smart up-to-date coach, and good roads.

After a visit with my family, I got up at four a.m. and got back to work in Brattleboro at eight. Those morning rides, after one got awake, were too wonderful ever to forget. Vermont at sunrise is a pretty grand place.

The above selection was excerpted from "A Bit of Family History: Memories by Charles Gray Atwood" from Joyce Coil.



The Townshend Common

In colonial America, a "Common" was a tract of land used by all members of the community, usually for pasture, park or public gatherings. On February 28, 1803 Ephraim Wheelock leased "to the inhabitants of Townshend" 2.75 acres of land, the lease being contingent on the land being used for a church". It is unclear who would assume ownership of this land in the event that the church ceased to function. The Meeting House (Townshend Church) had been built in 1791 but the common land was so broken and full of rocks that it was almost impassable. In 1821 Rev. Clark described the Common in this way; "the rocks and large stones had mostly been removed, yet the holes where they had laid remained unfilled..."

By the time of the Civil War it was a smooth lawn and often referred to as Townshend Park. The students of the Seminary took a large part in improving the look of the Common by setting out trees and maintaining what was considered almost the school campus. In 1892 the Park Association was charged with the upkeep of the Common and proceeded to install the ornamental fountain in the center. The water was piped from springs on Peaked Mountain but proved unreliable, and in 1977 a new source was established from the elementary school. The town is now responsible for the Common's maintenance.

The Common has been the natural focus of the village. It had been used in early times as a market place for livestock, later as school recreation land for both the early Leland Seminary and elementary school, and in more modern times the site of town gatherings, fairs, parades, vigils, concerts, graduations, farmers markets and even the filming of a movie.

The Townshend Common plays a concentrating role for Townshend and is a material symbol for the town's evolution through the past two and a half centuries. Beginning as a wooded, broken tract that had to be cleared of trees and boulders by men working with horse and ox teams, it became the focus of what was essentially a frontier settlement. With the arrival of churches, district school, stores, Leland Seminary and taverns and hotels, the Common became the center of a thriving town. The town has since changed in many ways, but the Common continues to be its social, civic and commercial center.

From "A Stitch in Time" and Townshend Historical Society archives



HISTORY FAIR- TUNBRIDGE- JUNE 21-22, 2014

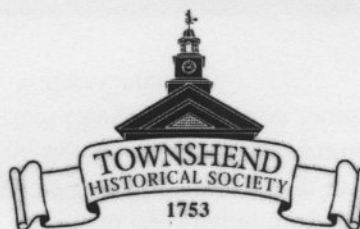
The Townshend Historical Society was represented at the biennial Vermont State History Expo at the Tunbridge Fair Grounds.

There were over 100 exhibits, and the Townshend booth was one of the most interesting. It was centered on the paintings of Theodore Robinson, an American Impressionist, and his colleague, Lucy Booth in 1895. Robinson lived in the Wood-Wheelock house (now DuGrenier Taft Hill Collection) and Booth lived on East Hill Rd.

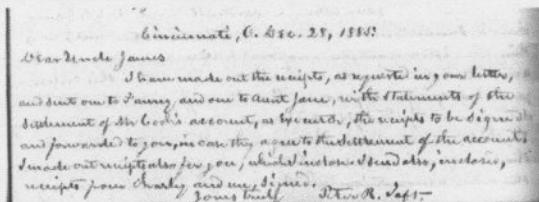
The booth was highlighted by two locally owned original Booth paintings and other illustrations and texts explaining the artists' connection to Townshend. It was set up by Tom Lyman and Walter Corcoran, manned on Saturday by Heidi Clawson and Marge Holt and on Sunday by Lisle Moran and Walter Corcoran.

Recent Acquisitions

The Historical Society has acquired two handsome account books of James Phelps of West Townshend. These ledgers, dating 1838 to 1886, show the financial and civic involvement of a very prominent figure in town who compiled and published, beginning in 1877, the early history of Townshend. His "Collections Relating to the History and Inhabitants of the Town of Townshend, Vermont" minutely details the life of two early settlements, West Townshend and Acton. Phelps was related by marriage to Alphonso Taft, father of President William Howard Taft, and the ledgers show the many investments both men made in Townshend and later Cincinnati.



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Bicycle Pete

Bicycle Pete was a character who earned his keep by painting shop signs, plus murals that included eagles and deer on barns with accompanying advertisements. Pete had a box of paints and brushes strapped to the back of his bike and traveled up and down Route 30 and other Vermont roads painting signs. The store owner would furnish the sign board and provide some type of overnight accommodations. Pete was once seen in Bondville during the 1960's where he and his dog were looking to camp out for the night in a local barn. The husky-type dog earned his keep by pulling the bike along, and they both spent that particular night out behind Bouten's Bear Cub Restaurant.

Norris Mandingo Barton, aka Bicycle Pete, was born in 1902 in Rutland where his father was a clerk who died when Pete was three years old. We know nothing further until the 1930 and 1940 Census reveal that Pete was at the Brattleboro Retreat. The good news is that he was rehabilitated enough to become a self-employed, itinerant artist until the final two years of his life when he settled in Bennington.

As the *Bennington Banner* (8/25/66) reports, "Bicycle Pete always has a captive audience wherever he goes when he demonstrates his artistic ability with paper, scissors, and pencil. An interesting and unusual character, he has traveled extensively in the US and throughout the world. He is currently pre-occupied with the ambition of hunting and downing the infamous Vermont panther."

Anyone with more information or a photo of Bicycle Pete is invited to contact Heidi at hi505clawson@svcable.net. We're told that a photo may have appeared in a local paper such as the *Manchester Journal* or *Guide*.

