



# Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

September 2023

## A Message From the Board President

As fall approaches, we at the Historical Society are glad to have the Holcomb House open again on the second and fourth Sundays of the month. Special programs are scheduled throughout the upcoming months. Keep an eye out for them.

Please plan to stop in to see our vast collection of past life in Johnson.

In spite of storms on Tuesdays through the summer, Tuesday Night Live was successful. Thanks to everyone who made pies and helped to make it happen.

We are always looking for volunteers. If anyone is interested in preserving the past, please contact us.

Dick Simays

## HISTORY OF FIVE FORMER RESIDENTS OF JOHNSON

### GEORGE SANFORD MILLS -- 1821 - 1890

George Sanford Mills was the last child of Daniel and Betsy Mills. George lived on a farm near Prospect Rock. He built the Waterman Bridge in 1868. According to family history, everyday while the bridge was being constructed, he walked from his home west of the village to the site of the bridge.

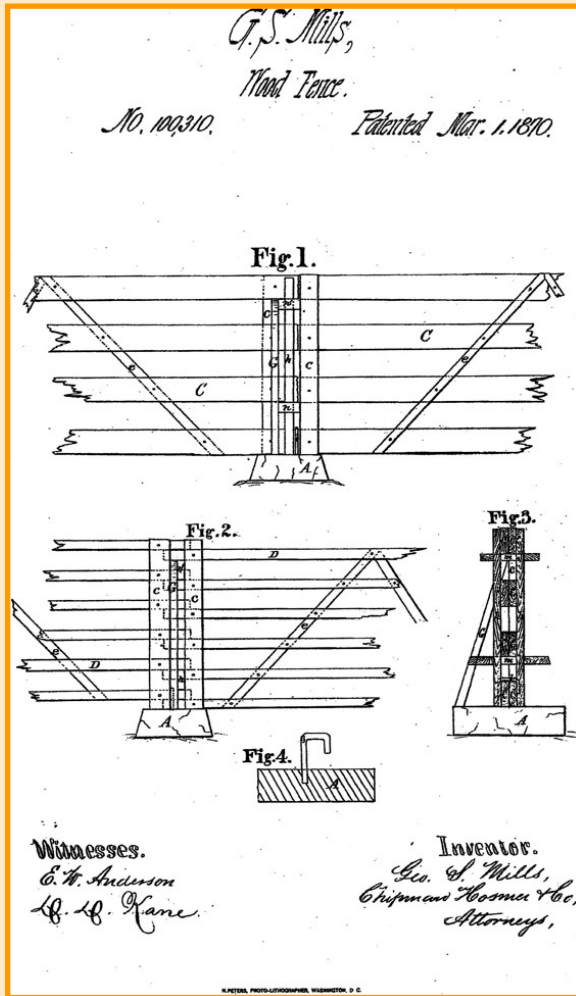


Farm at Prospect Rock



Side View of Waterman Bridge

This bridge crossed the Waterman Brook and was located on what is now known as Waterman Road. The structure was Queen post with a span of 87 feet.



Waterman Bridge

The Waterman Bridge was listed on the National Historic Register in 1974. It survived over 100 years but tragically collapsed in 1982.

Another interesting fact about George, he held Letters Patent #100,310 for improvement in fence which was dated March 1, 1870.

Following information taken from the original Letters Patent. My invention relates to fences, and consists mainly in the construction and novel arrangement of devices whereby a wooden fence may be built on a stone foundation, in an expeditious, cheap and durable manner.

## WADSWORTH FULTON WATERS -- 1853 - 1940

Wadsworth Fulton Waters was the son of Samuel G. and Abby Richards Waters of Johnson, Vermont. The following was written in 2004 by E. Roger Miller (1919 - 2005) who was the grandson of Wadsworth Waters. E. Roger was the third generation with S. R. Miller Insurance Co.

## HISTORY OF THE WATERS BUTTER WORKER

It was after the death of my Grandparents, that I discovered my Grandfather Wadsworth Waters had invented and patented the Waters Butter Worker on July 16, 1896.



Waters Name on Butter Worker

In my search for Waters Butter Workers, I found many copycats who tried to infringe on Grandfather's patent. They were usually smaller in size and lacked the Waters name. Throughout the years, I received information that the shop was located on the Gihon River a short distance from the Old Wooden Rake Factory which was located at the dam near the twin bridges on Route 100C in East Johnson. The farmers



*Side View of Butter Worker*

who bought and operated the Butter Workers were very proud of their butter and went to great lengths to make sure their butter was branded with their name so that by looking at the butter, you would know who made it.



*Top of Butter Worker*

The Butter Workers were crated and shipped to buyers throughout the United States and many foreign countries. Sales continued to 10 + years, until improvements and new inventions made the Butter Worker a thing of the past.

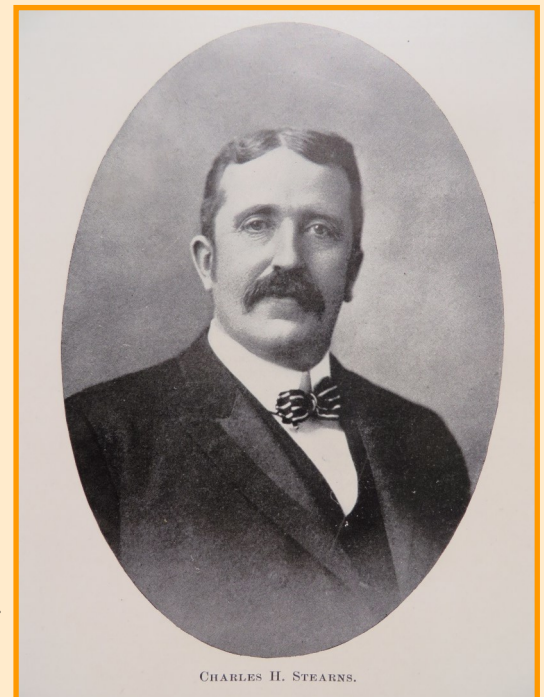
This Butter Worker consisted of a hardwood frame, tray with a wooden scrolled roller and a geared crank handle that moved the roller back and forth to squeeze the fluid out of the butter after it had been transferred from the churn to the Butter Worker. The butter would be placed in wooden molds to harden for future use. The liquid was called buttermilk and was used for cooking.

### **CHARLES HENRY STEARNS -- 1854 - 1936**

Charles was the son of Otis and Mary Carpenter Stearns. In 1874, at the age of 20, Charles entered into partnership with his father in the manufacture of butter tubs and boxes. In a few years, he became sole proprietor of the business. Charles married Viola A. Hall in 1876 and a son, Chester Arthur was born in 1883.

Charles was in the Vermont House of Representatives from 1886 - 1888. He served in the Vermont Senate from 1898 - 1900.

In 1901, Charles and Harry C. Parker founded Parker & Stearns. Charles was engaged for several years in the lumber business and was instrumental in developing Parker & Stearns hardwood flooring mill.



*C. H. Stearns*

From 1904 to 1906, Charles served as the 45th Lt. Governor for the state of Vermont. In 1917, he sold his shares of Parker & Stearns to Harry C. Parker. May 1917, Charles and his son Chester Arthur purchased the Grist Mill and in August 1917, the mill was completely destroyed by fire. Charles and his son immediately rebuilt on the old mill site. The business became known as C. H. Stearns and Son. Charles served as President of the St. J & L.C. Railroad and was also Vice President and a director of the Union Savings and Trust Company of Morrisville.

### **GEORGIA WELLS STEARNS BALCH – 1888 – 1981**

Georgia was born in Canada. During her youth she and her parents moved to Johnson and lived in the hotel on Main Street that her parents owned and operated.

In 1914 Georgia married Chester Arthur Stearns, son of C. H. and Viola Stearns. A beautiful new home on Stearns Street (Route 100C) was given to Georgia and Chester as a wedding gift from his parents.

Georgia and Chester had a daughter Joyce who was born in August 1915. Unfortunately, Chester died in 1919, during the influenza pandemic, leaving Georgia and Joyce alone.



*Hotel on Main Street*



*Georgia and Joyce*

Art was a passion of Georgia's and she decided to devote her life to it. She and four year old Joyce went to Kansas City where Georgia attended the Art Institute.

When Georgia and Joyce returned to Vermont from Kansas City, Georgia married Rollin Balch. They moved back into her home on Stearns Street. Her studio would soon be filled with many oil paintings of local landscapes. There was a sign on their lawn that said "Paintings of Vermont by Georgia Balch". Tourists from far and wide were welcomed to visit her studio to see her art and purchase the oil paintings.

Georgia started doing Yarn Art pictures in later years when it was too difficult for her to use the brush. Her Yarn Art was lovely and she sold it as well. Georgia was listed in Who's Who in American Art.



*House and Garden*



*Stearns Street*



*Sugaring Scene*



*Georgia*



*Yarn Art Scene*



*Yarn Art Winter Scene*

## RUTH GREEN MOULD – 1894 – 1979

Ruth grew up in Morrisville and studied art as a child. The arts were her passion and she continued her study at the Institute of Art in St. Paul, Minnesota. She graduated from the Institute with honors. She continued her study at the Art Students League in New York City.

In 1919 Ruth returned to Vermont and married Willis Mould, a mining engineer and geologist. She taught art to students at Johnson Normal School and in the Montpelier school system, as well as to many Central Vermont women.

Ruth and Willis lived in many Vermont towns, including on Pearl Street in Johnson. Willis always made sure that Ruth had a private studio wherever they lived. Willis was superintendent of the Talc Mill. They left Johnson in 1940.



*Twin Bridges on Pearl Street*



*Floral*

The honor of being one of two artists representing the State of Vermont at the World's Fair in New York was bestowed upon Ruth in 1939.

Ruth was well known for her oil portraits, still life and landscapes.

Hanging in the State House is her painting of Edna Beard, the first female member in both the Vermont House and Senate. There are three of her paintings of Vermont Chief Justices that hang in the Vermont Supreme Court Building.

Several of Ruth's paintings were gifted to Johnson State College. Some have been displayed at the Dibden Center, Vermont State University Johnson Campus.



*Ruth*



*Decorative art on doors at Ruth's residence.*



## WHAT IS THIS ITEM? DOES ANYONE REMEMBER SEEING THIS?

Eric Osgood recently dug this item up on his property which is adjacent to the Arboretum. This area used to be known as Checkerberry Field, now known as Nelson Duba Field, and ballgames used to be played there.



The general idea, of people who have seen this piece, is that it was probably used to smooth between the bases on the ball field. Does anyone recognize or remember seeing this? What do you think it was used for?

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