



Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

February 2024

Hopefully everyone had a wonderful Holiday season. As we enter the new year, we at the Historical Society will continue the presentation of the history of Johnson. With regular open days at the Holcomb House and special programs we are able to showcase our storied past.

Our annual membership drive is now on. I hope all of you will continue your membership or establish new ones. Please consider an additional contribution in support of the Historical Society. If anyone needs assistance in special giving, please contact any Board member.

Thank you all for your support and please think about a visit to the Holcomb House.

Dick Simays, President

THE HISTORY OF BEARD HARDWARE 1928-2007

Harold Franklin Beard Sr. began working at a general store in Waterville at the age of 13. This store was operated under joint ownership of Beard Brothers, Harold and Jim, from 1913-1922 when the interest was transferred to Jeffersonville. The brothers built up a very successful general store there which they ran for six years.

In 1928, Harold purchased Riddle Brothers hardware business in Johnson. The building was owned by Robert and Fran Barrows. This sale included all the stock, some of which included sugaring utensils and tin ware that had been made by the Riddle boys. Many sugar makers in town and surrounding areas would have used those sap buckets. It is known that some of these buckets still exist, all these years later.

Harold and wife Eunice and children lived in the apartment above the store. In those days there was only one apartment. Hubert began working in his father's store at the age of 10.

In the early days, the store catered to the mines, mills and farmers as well as the home owners. There were farming supplies, plow points, furnace grates for wood and coal, piping and all kinds of hardware. Harold introduced new lines of merchandise to meet the needs of his customers. Included were refrigerators, radios, Glenwood and Stewart stoves, new lines of cabinet heaters, toys for kids, sporting goods, kitchenware and a more complete line of general hardware.



Smoky scene at the hardware store fire

The store was open six days a week.

On February 15, 1942 a fire started in the backroom of the hardware store. It went straight up through the roof wiping out the inside of the store, however, the structure was saved. As can be seen in the fire pictures, many people braved the cold weather to come and witness the fire at their beloved hardware store.

Work began on the restoration of the store. You will notice in the fire picture that below the second story porch was an open porch area which allowed access to the store. The bay windows were added to make more space and to close in that open front area. The store also had to be restocked.

An interesting fact told by Alan was that the building had been jacked up sometime during the 1800's and the basement was put in.

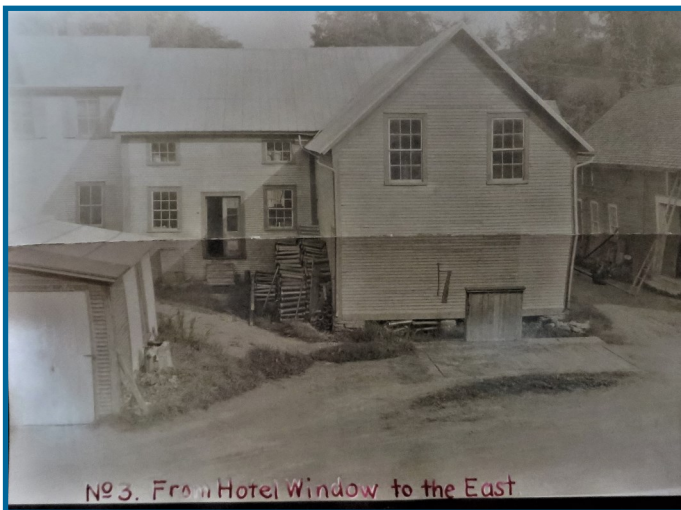
There were four backrooms, all of which were moved from different locations. The original town scales were located in the back in the area now used for parking. The office area was also an add-on.



Controlling the fire



Store front after the windows were added



Town scales behind the store

Harold sold the business and all stock to Hubert in 1948. The Barrows continued to own the building.

Harold was a businessman of great integrity and very beneficial to his community and the Lamoille Valley area.

After selling the business and retiring, Harold and Eunice moved to Florida.

Hubert took over the store with great enthusiasm. It was always a full service operation. Stock included the above mentioned items as well as appliances, washing machines, stoves, refrigerators, etc. Hubert continued to sell appliances until the Vermont Electric Cooperative

opened up the Appliance Division in 1950.

Florence joined Hubert working in the store in the early 1950's once the three children, Alan, Bruce and Carole were in school. She became a full time clerk and bookkeeper which allowed Hubert to be out in the community.



Harold & Eunice after retirement



L-R: Florence, Eunice, Hubert, Harold

Hubert was the first person in town to sell propane. He would deliver 100 pound cylinders of propane, which was all used for cooking, with his hand truck. He started this service soon after purchasing the business and continued it up into the 1970's.

When you entered the store on your left was a glass topped case which held fishing tackle, jack knives and more valuable items.

Another interesting fact, Beard's sold most of the guns and ammunition in Lamoille County. Hubert would buy, sell and trade.

From 1958 through the 1980's, Hubert was a dealer in selling Simplicity Lawn Tractors and mowers. He also sold push mowers, whatever brand he could get his hands on.

Many readers will remember that Hubert always rode a Vespa motor scooter to work during all seasons. Snow, wind, sleet or hail was not about to stop him. He was also a dealer in Vespa Scooters from 1958 -1959 through the 1960's.



Hubert on his Vespa

When Hubert began selling Philco televisions, he came up with an ingenious plan. He had a trailer with a test antenna and a television all set up. This trailer would be taken to homes of people who expressed interest in purchasing a television. When arriving at the home he would raise the antenna to check if they would be able to get reception.

Hubert had a great ability to fix anything and everything. He always repaired whatever he sold. There was no need for advertising, word of mouth was all that was needed. Everyone knew he was an excellent repairman.

Circa the 1960's, Hubert sold Husky & Tradewinds snow machines.

As time went on, the inventory was increased as needed. The shelves were full but Hubert and Florence knew exactly where to find the items. They might be on a shelf, in a backroom or in the basement, however, they could put their hands on the items without a problem.



Vespa parked on Main Street on Freight Friday

Local families have shared memories of purchasing winter boots for their children in the store. Also available were adult boots, such as Snowpac and Sorrel. They stocked ice skates, ski boots and snowshoes, all available for winter activities.

The store was open 6 days a week but closed on Wednesday afternoon, when Hubert would make a trip into Burlington to the wholesalers to buy goods and wares to restock the store. When the big box stores, Home Depot and Lowes opened, Beards opened up on Sundays. It was always a family run business, the kids worked while growing up.

All grandchildren took turns helping out on Freight Fridays during the summer. Who remembers those Fridays, when Hubert parked his Vespa on the street in front of the store taking up the parking places in order for the freight truck to be able to back into the narrow driveway on the East side of the building?

Hubert and Florence purchased the building in the early 1970's and linked in with True Value around 1982.

In 1995 Alan retired from General Electric and decided to work alongside his parents in the store.



Store with True Value sign



Florence, Hubert, Alan

He continued working there for 12 years, until the decision was made to close.

All good things must come to an end and so in January of 2007 Beard Hardware starting liquidating their stock with 10%-30% off sales. These sales ran until the end of May. The building sold in May 2007.

Alan and Bruce built a barn on their property to store the items that did not sell.

Beard Hardware was remarkable, a unique full service, family business for nearly 80 years. A place where you could go to purchase anything you needed and visit with friends. If they didn't have what you were looking for they would order it or most likely Hubert could make it for you. Hubert and Florence were true legends in their own time.

Many thanks for all the wonderful memories.



Glimpse inside store



Varieties of merchandise

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT FLORENCE AND HUBERT

Florence volunteered, at the start of the Cold War, at the observatory which was located above the college. She would spend 2 hours at a time in an 8'x8' shack which was equipped with a telephone and a log book. She was watching for and reporting any airplane that flew over the area.

She was a member of the United Church of Johnson.

When Florence became a full time clerk and bookkeeper at the store, Hubert was available to become very active in the community.

Below are many activities that Hubert was able to accomplish.

Hubert was involved with Emergency War Time teaching at Lamoille Central Academy from July 1944-July 1945, teaching Industrial Arts.

He was Instrumental in starting the Boy Scout Troop 94 in the early 1950's and remained the troops Scout Master until the early 1970's. He began the Air Explorers program for the older scouts.

He was a pilot and owned his own airplane. He flew it three times to Florida to visit his parents.

He loved downhill skiing and set up a rope tow beside his house for Johnson kids. He built a skating rink on the Mill Pond-Gihon River. He even set up lights for night skating. He showed movies in the back of the store on Saturday afternoons for the kids.

He was a active member of Waterman Masonic Lodge 83 and the Order of the Eastern Star. He was an active member of the United Church.

Hubert dedicated 80 years of his life serving the Johnson community. Florence was by his side in the store for 50+ years.

What an amazing legacy, Johnson's hometown HEROS!!



Hubert's airplane



Hubert on skis



Rope tow beside the Beard house on School Street

NOTES:

PICTURE OF HUBERT, FLORENCE AND ALAN CREDITED TO VT LIFE

ALL OTHER PICTURES CREDITED TO THE BEARD FAMILY

Board of Directors:

Dick Simays, President

Mary Jean Smith, Vice President

Dennis Richards, Secretary

Kelly Vandorn, Treasurer

Alice Whiting, Membership Chair

Board Members:

Lois Frey

Linda Jones

SINCERE APOLOGIES GO TO DENNIS RICHARDS FOR OMITTING HIS NAME FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE.

Holcomb House Open Hours

Second and Fourth Sunday of the month from 1-3pm through the month of February.

Beginning in March the hours will be as follows, second Friday of the month from 9-12 and fourth Sunday from 1-3pm. Also by appointment—call any board member

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