



Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

January 2025

Welcome to the new year!

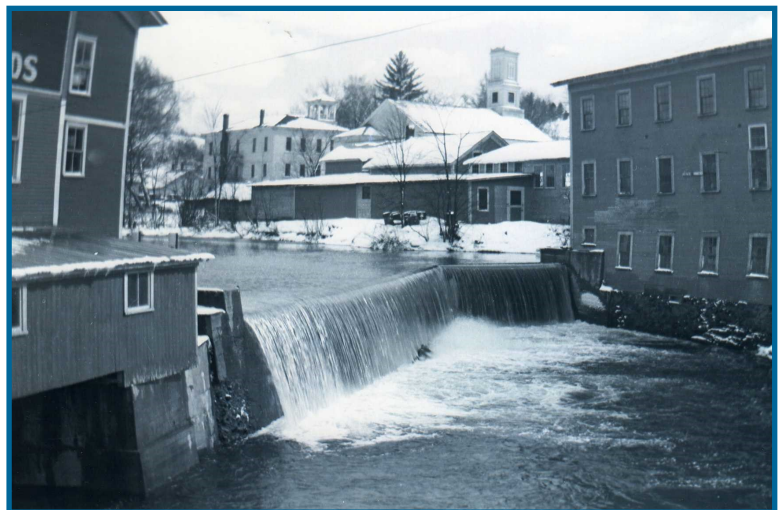
As we look back, we reflect on our achievements of 2024. Our renovations and move to the second floor of the Holcomb House, the successes at Tuesday Night Live and several interesting presentations about Johnson History. Thank you to everyone who helped along the way and to all who continue to support the Johnson Historical Society.

Richard Simays, President

HISTORY OF JOHNSON'S LONGEST CONTINUING BUSINESS JOHNSON WOOLEN MILLS

Our earliest history of Johnson, written by Mattie Baker, titled History of the Town of Johnson, Vermont, 1784-1907 Mattie states: "Simeon Lyman seems to have started the woolen factory industry, aside from the wool-carding, as we find from the Land records that in 1816 Joseph Waterman deeded to Simeon Lyman a "Privilege of water at the lower falls on the North Branch of the River Lamoille to be taken from the mill-dam flume sufficient to carry a Fully mill, napping and shearing machine, and machinery for cutting dyewood, together with the buildings now erected for fulling and cloth dressing." In reviewing the actual deed and land records, we were able to determine that this is in fact what the deed states.

In the early days of Johnson, farmers were raising sheep for meat and their wool for clothing. Women would card the wool by hand which was a tedious task. The carding was accomplished by using two stiff brushes back and forth to separate the sheep wool for spinning and weaving. Joseph Waterman introduced a wool carding machine which was a great help to the early day women. Waterman sells the carding machine to Dow and will be referenced later in the story.



Dam on the river between the Woolen Mill and the Grist Mill

The next deed, dated states, "February 20, 1829, Simeon Lyman deeded to Harry Gloyd and Andrew Dow privilege of water at the lower falls in the North Branch," as stated in above deed from Waterman to Lyman. Additionally, "Gloyd and Dow" are to pay two dollars annually in labor or otherwise for keeping in repair the mill dam and are to have equal privilege of water with the other machinery at said falls after Grist Mill is supplied.

Gloyd and Dow enlarged the mill, adding spinning machines and looms. Dow made stout cloth for the farmers from 1842 to 1862.

On the 19th day of March 1838, Joseph Waterman sold to Andrew Dow a certain piece of land in Johnson as follows: "It being a tenement situated on the lower falls of the North Branch and including the situation that said Dow now holds and occupies for fulling and cloth dressing with the additional privilege of water and extension of building for running a Carding Machine for all custom work by paying two dollars per year in view of the extension of privileges towards keeping the dam in repair. Said Waterman is to keep said dam in good and reasonable repair, having suitable time at all times, to do the same and the said Dow is to have the use of water to supply said carding machine (next after a supply for the grist mill, when its use is necessary for that use) in preference to other machinery."



Woolen Mill with wood pile

Gloyd retired from the mill and Andrew's brother Stephen joined the business. "On March 19, 1838, for a sum of \$850, Andrew conveyed to his brother one equal undivided half of all buildings and machinery now occupied for fulling and cloth dressing together including carding machinery appendages and privileges as I hold them by purchase, subject to water and expense of dam repairs equal in manner and form as I hold them."



Old Mill by river

When Andrew retired, Issac L. Pearl became a partner followed by Stephen retiring and then Orange Buck became a partner with Pearl. Buck and Pearl were operating both the woolen mill and the grist mill at this time and eventually Buck ended his partnership with Pearl which left Buck with the grist mill only.

The old mill along the Gihon River burned circa 1870 and it is believed that the burning of the mill ended the weaving done for the farmers. A new mill was completed in 1875 and the wool continued to be turned into yarn and cloth.



Woolen Mill that has sign -Makers of Best Wearing Trousers in America

In 1890, I. L. Pearl's son, Jed A. joined, and the business and the mill became known as I. L. Pearl & Son Co. This same year, 1890, was the beginning of the famous trousers and the advertisement stating, "MAKER OF THE BEST WEARING TROUSERS IN AMERICA".

Mr. D. A. Barrows purchased the mill in 1905 from I. L. Pearl & Son Co. after having purchased wool from them for 10-12 years and reselling it in the retail market. D. A. built a new factory

the same year and added a new modern office in 1923. With his knowledge and insight of retail, he decided to add a new line of clothing which included hunting coats, mackinaws, etc. Weaving the wool and dyeing the cloth continued during this time frame, however, at a much greater cost as Vermont began shifting from sheep to dairy cows and wool needed to be brought in from areas outside of the State of Vermont to supplement the decline in Vermont wool.

Robert S. Barrows, son of D. A. Barrows, joined the firm in 1926 as a junior partner and became President when a corporation was formed in 1930. This is the year the Jac shirt came into existence.

Robert's son, Delmar R. Barrows, came on board in 1955, serving as vice president. This is the year that weaving, dyeing and spinning wool came to an end at Johnson Woolen Mills and wool fabric was thereafter produced offsite and purchased in rolls to manufacture clothing. Del was responsible for opening the Retail Store in 1963 and then several years later, a new factory and inventory warehouse were built around 1986 on land directly to the east, where the old United Church stood before being destroyed by fire in 1969.



Woolen Mill with office and retail store

Stacy Barrows Manosh, great granddaughter of D. A. Barrows, took several roles while she was growing up and learned the business, especially the areas of dealers, wholesale and retail. She was a salesperson and often drove to far away retail stores in Northern Maine to deliver products, take orders and check in on her customers. In 1988 she acquired the company from her father Del and one of her first tasks was to strengthen and grow the Japanese market. She had representatives selling Johnson Woolen Mills products across the country and often went to large trade shows to display products in places like Las Vegas, Nevada, Salt Lake City, Utah, and The Big E in Massachusetts.

Stacy broadened the product line to include women's and children's coats and pants, handbags, dog beds and dog coats. She started an online store and in 2014, began working with cotton flannel and created Green Mountain Flannel.

The 118-year legacy of the local Barrows family owning and operating Johnson Woolen Mills came to an end in January of 2023.

Gene Richards and Erin Desautels shadowed Johnson Woolen Mills with Stacy Barrows Manosh for 6 months, driving daily from Burlington to Johnson. This gave them the opportunity to get a feel of the operation of Johnson Woolen Mills.

The ownership of Johnson Woolen Mills was taken over on January 27, 2023, by Gene who is in partnership with Erin Desautels, his wife Julie and sons Eugene & Stephen.

The goal is to preserve the legacy brand, Johnson Woolen Mills for the community, State of Vermont and to bring it back to its core roots.

Gene told me that Stacy worked hard and did everything herself. He said she deserves to be credited for her hard work and for keeping the business alive and in Vermont when so many others are leaving the State of Vermont and sometimes the country.

Renovations of the Factory Store and Old Back Mill building began on day one, which included a new sprinkler system, electrical and plumbing work, new floors and new windows and exterior paint.

Preparations in the Old Back Mill are being made for a restaurant on the Second Floor and five efficient housing units for the third floor with a gathering space on the lowest floor at Gihon River level. The view from the Third Floor looking up the Gihon River will "TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY". It is absolutely gorgeous!

Old Mill on river as it looks today



Other exciting additional happenings at the Mill include the following:

- *An old truck garage had been repurposed by Stacy into a home and that has since been remodeled and turned into an Airbnb with a Johnson Woolen Mill theme inside.
- *38,000 pounds of wool scraps have been found and those have been shared with the Northeast community to be utilized by various crafters and quilters thereby making room for the new restaurant & kitchen space in the Old Back Mill.
- *There are 3 Baby Doll sheep mascots that live in a small barn attached to the Factory Store.
- *The Sheep's Den space was opened June 23, 2023, in part of the basement of the Factory Store. It carries Vintage Johnson Woolen Mills garments and other items that are marked down.
- *When Johnson flooded in July of 2023, the Woolen Mill did a weekly BBQ for the community and invited anyone to come for about four months.
- *There is a deer weighing station in the back for the second year in a row and seems to be quite popular.
- *During the Jubilee in 2023 and 2024, stuffed sheep were given away. Children and adults could be seen walking on the street carrying their new stuffed sheep. It was fun to see.
- *Gene has agreed to make flannel blankets for Copley Hospital birthing unit for the newborn babies at a very reduced cost.
- *The Johnson Fire Department has trained at and toured at the mill.
- *There is never any need to worry about the Woolen Mill campus when it is closed because the Alex Nadeau family keeps track of it.

The parting words from Johnson Woolen Mills are that Gene and Erin are very grateful for the Johnson Woolen Mills team of stitchers, cutters and store staff that allow Johnson Woolen Mills to continue to thrive and produce a Johnson, Vermont, Made in USA product.

If you haven't visited Johnson Woolen Mills recently, I encourage you to do so. It is absolutely wonderful and a huge boost for Johnson. Thank you, Gene and Erin!!

A VERY INTERESTING FACT: Simeon Lyman who is mentioned in the beginning of the newsletter is Erin Desautels', Fourth Great Grandfather. This information brings the story full circle.

A personal note from Linda Jones to Gene Richards and Erin Desautals, thank you very much for working with me and sharing information about your journey thus far with Johnson Woolen Mills. We all wish you the very best.

SOURCES:

History of The Town of Johnson, Vermont, 1784-1907, Compiled and Published Under Direction of the OREAD LITERARY CLUB FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE JOHNSON PUBLIC LIBRARY FUND 1907 led by Mattie Baker, First President of the Oread Club, and Chairman of the Committee in charge of the Compilation of the Johnson History, pages 17-18.

History of Johnson, Vermont, Compiled by OREAD LITERARY CLUB COMMITTEE, Margaret T. Smalley, Ethel S. Hill, Helen May, Zillah Rexford, Frances Chitwood, 1961, pages 22-26.

Village of Johnson Municipal Offices, Land Records, 293 Lower Main Street west, Johnson, Vermont 05656

Searching for a Replacement Volunteer

The Johnson Historical Society has published newsletters since late 2018 and it has continued to be very popular with our members. We have received many positive comments for each newsletter. We now publish three times per year, January, May and September. Since the beginning we have been very fortunate to have Luciana (Swenson) Soares setting up the text and photos, getting it ready for publication.

She has left Johnson for a few years, and now we are searching for someone to take over this task of placing text and photos into Microsoft Publisher (or your preferred tool). Luciana will furnish the templates to whomever we find to fill her shoes.

Are you, or do you know anyone, who has those skills and time to volunteer for the Johnson Historical Society in the above mentioned capacity? If so, please contact Linda Jones for more information at 802-635-7401. Email: silinjones@comcast.net

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