



JOHNSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The mission of the Johnson Historical Society is to preserve our history by weaving stories of the past with the present, using our collections of artifacts and displays, creating a legacy for future generations.

THE WHITING FAMILY

Our story begins on July 8th, 1747 in Dedham, Massachusetts when Zachariah II was born to Zachariah and Elizabeth Phillips Whiting. On November 11, 1769 Zachariah II married Desire Guild in Dedham. To this union nine children were born. Three of these children will be highlighted below and they are; Gerry born in 1775, Hannah born in 1781 and Zachariah III born in 1789.

Gerry married Abigail Nabby Starrett on September 3, 1798. Gerry and Abigail lived in New Boston, New Hampshire. Ten children were born to this union. For the purpose of this history their three sons will be featured; Dexter, Harris and Calvin. These three brothers left New Boston together, settling in Johnson in the early 1830's and remained in town throughout the remainder of their lives.



Dexter Whiting House

Dexter was born in 1803. He married Mary Stone in 1828 and seven children were born to this union. Dexter and family lived in the house at 285 Clay Hill. He was a farmer and tanner. Below his house was the mill where he ground bark for his tannery. It was situated near the beginning of the meadow below the road. Water power for the mill came from a tiny stream near the road north from the village.

He was very involved in town affairs, holding the office of Town Clerk from 1839-1842. Dexter also served as a selectman during the following years, 1838-39, 1846-48, 1863-64 and 1872-73. For many years he was Deacon of the First Congregational Church and a principal supporter. In 1882 he had the town clock installed in the Baptist Church, (now the Masonic Temple) and donated it to the town. The story is that he placed the clock there so that he could see it from his home. Dexter passed away in 1889 and is buried at Lamoille View Cemetery.

Deacon Harris was born in 1805. He married Mary Dodge in 1832. Mary attended the old Johnson Academy and at the age of 17 began teaching at a district school in town.

Harris was a farmer. He was one of the farmers who had a large team of horses and would transport goods into Boston. Harris loaded his sled with miscellaneous produce, pork, butter, apples, etc. and drove to Boston. Supplies were brought back home for the families and stores. The trip would take several days with many teams traveling together. In the 1930's, on the trip back from Boston, a severe snowstorm hit and the teams were only able to make it back to Hyde Park. The men put up in the tavern for the night and on Sunday morning they all went home except Harris. Deacon Harris could not in good conscience travel on Sunday. He drove home Monday morning. Deacon Harris and Mary had eight children, all born in Johnson. Deacon Harris passed away in 1847 and is buried at Lamoille View Cemetery.

The sixth child born 10-5-1839 to Deacon Harris and Mary was Martha Caroline. In 1862 Martha Caroline, better known as Mattie, married Thomas Jefferson Baker and three children were born to this union. Mattie and Thomas lived in the big house on the hill across the street from the Academy/Normal School building.



Mattie and Thomas



Mattie T. Baker.

Mattie was one of the founders of the Oread Club established in 1898, a pioneer woman's club of Vermont and she was their first president. She wrote Johnson's first history book in 1907 which was published by the Oread Club.



Cold Spring

Mattie was one of two women who were included in the original five trustees of the library. In 1909 the library moved into its new building which was built by the Oread Club.

Many years ago she gave the Cold Spring, which was at the base of her hill, to the town. It is still being used today. Mattie passed away January 21, 1932. She and her husband Thomas are buried at Lamoille View Cemetery.

The next son, Calvin was born in 1810. After arriving in Johnson he married Abby Burnham in 1840. He was married the second time in 1846 to Caroline Dodge. Calvin and Caroline had four children. Caroline passed away in July 1856 and in early 1857 Calvin marries for the third time to his brother Harris' widow, Mary Dodge Whiting. He was a farmer throughout his life. Calvin passed away November 7, 1868 and is buried at Lamoille View Cemetery.

Following is an advertisement for the sale of his farm. This ad was taken from The Lamoille Newsdealer, April 6, 1869:

"A SPLENDID FARM AND LUXURIOUS AND PROFITABLE HOME ---HOMESTEAD OF THE LATE CALVIN WHITING

Said farm is situated on the Lamoille River, on the highway leading from Johnson to Hyde Park, also on the route of the proposed Lamoille Valley Railroad. It is two miles from Johnson, where is located a State Normal School and a District School within one mile. The buildings are new, large and elegant, never failing water running into both house and barn. A large variety of fruit trees planted last spring. The land is in a high state of cultivation, well fenced and will be sold in quantity to suit the purchaser.

Also a back pasture containing 800 acres, well fenced and watered.

Horses, Oxen, Cows and young cattle, with hay and grain (including 75 bushels of corn).

Dairy and farming tools sold with place if desired."

-T. J. Baker Administrator

After searching many deeds, a Plot map and other maps including an 1857 map, it was determined that Calvin owned the farm located on Route 15 E that at one time belonged to Leonce Bovin. What a small world!!



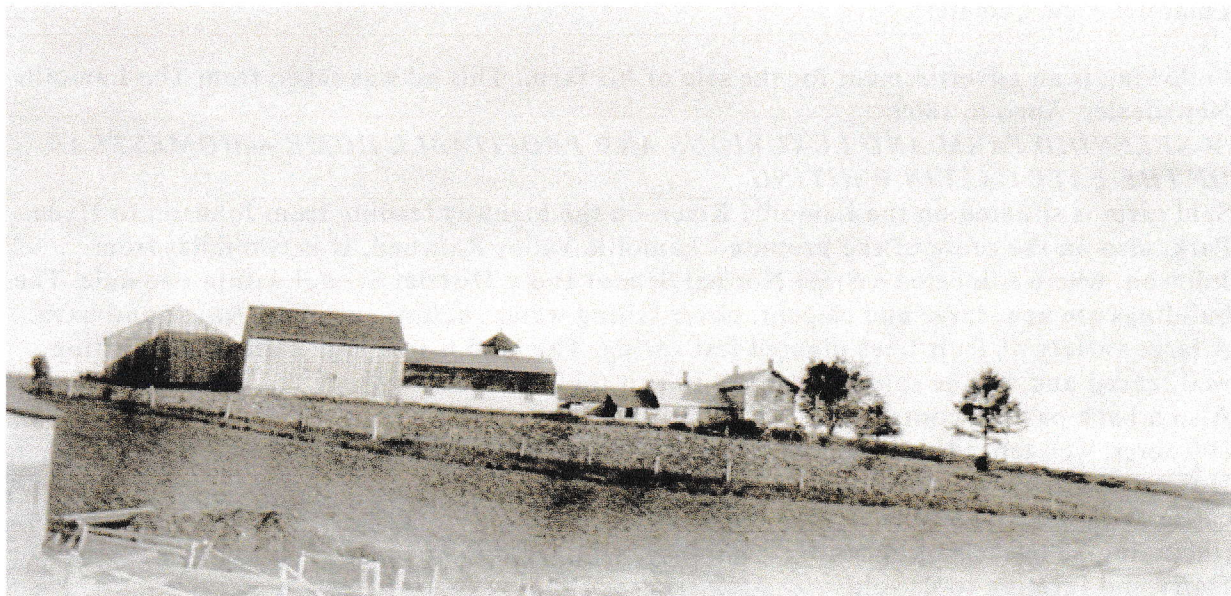
The Bovin barn taken in 2023

The next child of Zachariah II and Desire to highlight is Hannah who was born June 15, 1781 in Francestown, New Hampshire. On January 17, 1805, in Francestown, she married Benjamin Ober (who was born July 8, 1777). They moved to Johnson where Benjamin was a farmer. There were five children born to this union.

Hannah passed away August 29, 1835 and Benjamin passed May 15, 1860. They are buried at the Plot Cemetery. The area where Benjamin, Hannah and family lived was old road 10 now called Ben Ober Road.

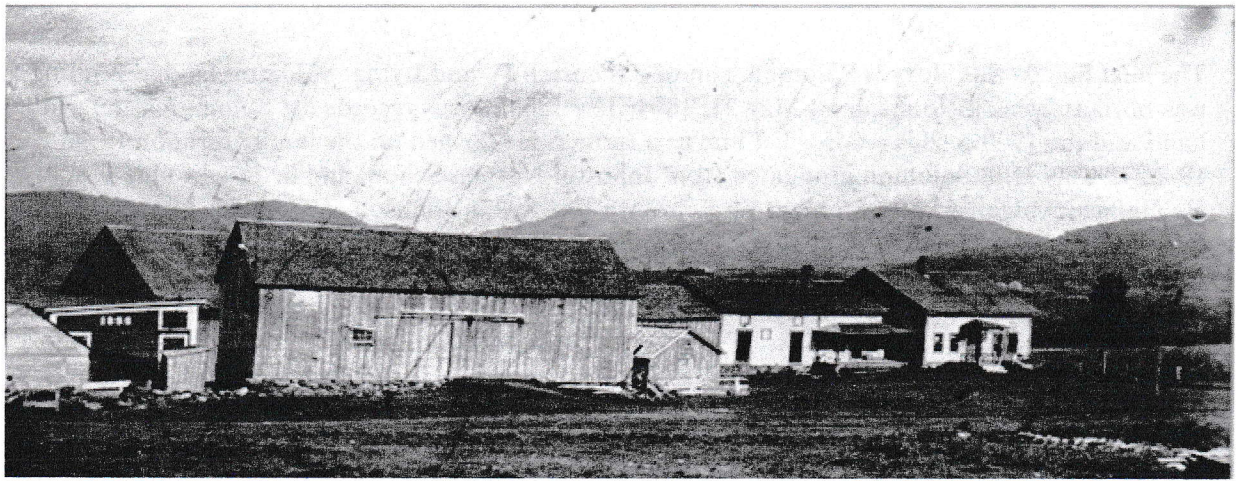
The last child born September 24, 1789 to Zachariah and Desire with connections to Johnson is Zachariah III. He was a soldier in the Battle of 1812, a Private in Dixon's Regiment. On July 13, 1815 Zachariah III married Lucinda Dodge, when he was 25 and she was only 15. They came to Johnson at an early date and settled on what was then known as Road 12. We believe that Zachariah built the farm where he spent the remainder of his life. Road 12 was in the area where today Swamp Road and Codding Hollow Road connect. To this union eight children were born.

Zachariah III was a wheelwright by trade. He worked at his trade in connection with farming until 1840. At that time he opened a general mercantile store in the Johnson. Zachariah III passed away October 31, 1861 and Lucinda passed away December 22, 1872. They are both buried at Plot Cemetery.



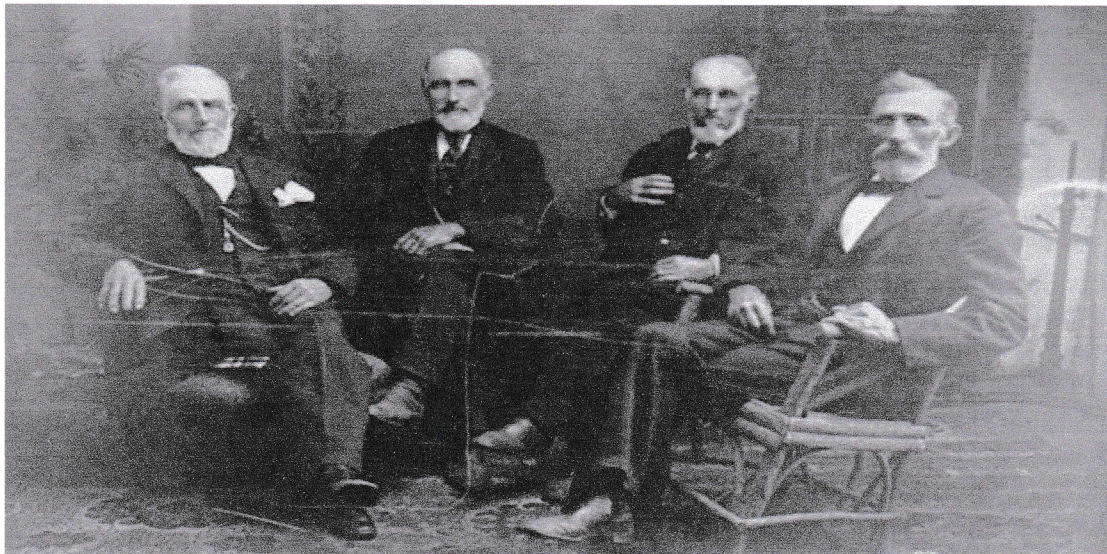
Zachariah Whiting Farm

Four of Zachariah and Lucinda's sons will be highlighted in this story. The first son is Freeman. He was born on the farm on January 8, 1822. He attended school in town and assisted his father on the farm until he was eighteen. At that time he began clerking in his father's mercantile store and continued there for three years. Freeman left Vermont and went to Illinois where he stayed for seven months before returning back home where he stayed for only a year. Freeman lived the remainder of his life in Illinois, passing away September 13, 1915.



Whiting Farm on Clay Hill

The next son is Zachariah IV who was born December 25, 1826 on the farm. He married Lydia Spaulding on March 15, 1857. Zachariah purchased land and we believe that he built the farm on then Road 19, at current 1775 Clay Hill. To this union three children were born; Alfred on May 30, 1859, Solomon on May 31, 1864 and Sarah on August 12, 1866. Lydia passed away in September 1873. Zachariah married Mary Jane Clark in 1875. Zachariah passed away October 28, 1897. He is buried at Plot Cemetery.



Four Whiting Brothers – L-R. Freeman, Zachariah IV, Almon and Arthur.

The third son to be highlighted is Almon G. who was born on the farm November 15, 1829. He attended school in Johnson and helped his father with the farming. Almon married Fannie Morgan on January 15, 1862 and they had three children. Almon was a farmer and he remained on the family farm, Road 12, most of his life. He was a highly respected citizen of Johnson. He passed away May 13, 1913 and is buried at Plot Cemetery.

The fourth son is Arthur who was born on the farm January 9, 1838. He attended school in Johnson and also helped on the family farm. Arthur moved to Illinois and married Antionette Whitlock September 10, 1862. He passed away June 7, 1916 in Fargo, North Dakota at the home of his daughter.

The next link to this story is Solomon, son of Zachariah IV and Lydia. Solomon Dodge Whiting was born at home in Johnson on May 31, 1864. The 1880 census records list Solomon as a farm hand and the 1900 census records list him as a farmer. He farmed on the family farm on Road 19-1775 Clay Hill. Solomon graduated from Johnson Normal School and he taught nine terms. He married Abigail Almira Stebbins on February 10, 1892 in Johnson. There were nine children born to this union. The two sons that have connections to Johnson will be highlighted.



Solomon and Abigail

It was in Mankato where Zach met Ellen Sophia Fisher while she was visiting at her brother's house. Zach and Ellen were married in Eagle Grove, Iowa on February 18, 1920. They moved back to Minnesota. To this union six children were born, Arthur, Marion, Lois, Mildred and Helen were born in Minnesota.

The first son is Zach born June 12, 1896 in Johnson. He graduated from Johnson High School and worked for his father on the farm. Zach attended Johnson Normal School. Solomon sold the family farm in 1902 to George Wheeler and he and his family moved to Mankato, Minnesota. Solomon and Abigail eventually moved back to Waterville and remained there until his death on May 30, 1939. Solomon is buried at Plot Cemetery.



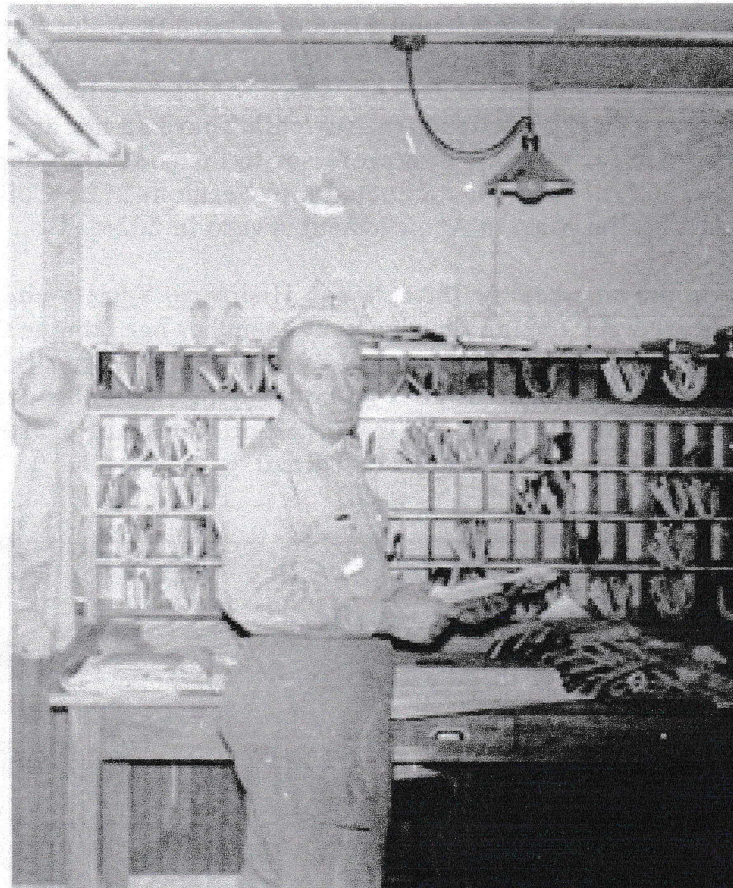
House When Owned By Wheeler



Whiting House in 1960

In 1932 Zach, Ellen and family moved to Waterville where Solomon and Abigail resided. Alice was born in Waterville in 1934. Zach worked at various jobs and eventually became a mailman for rural delivery. After living a number of places in Waterville, in 1951 he was transferred to the Johnson Post Office with a longer rural route. The family moved to East Johnson and lived on what is now known as Sinclair Road.

In 1953 Zach purchased the old family farm, which was located on the old Road 19, now 1775 Clay Hill from Frank Baraw. They owned a few cows, some sheep and chickens. The cows furnished milk for the family and there were always plenty of eggs. Summer brought haying season and due to the mail route the haying was done afternoons and evenings. Ellen drove the tractor and Zach picked up the bales of hay. In later years the farm was sold to Alan and Gerry Whitamore. Zach and Ellen moved to Stearns Street.



Zach Whiting

Zach passed away August 3, 1976 and Ellen passed away in 1990, both are buried at Lamoille View Cemetery.

Three of Zach and Ellen's daughters, Mildred, Helen and Alice have connections to Johnson and two of them still reside in town.

Mildred Whiting, the fourth child of Zach and Ellen, was born in Minnesota in 1928. After moving back to Vermont, she lived with her family in Waterville and graduated from Cambridge High School. She was a preschool teacher. Mildred married Douglas Sargent, who ran the Gulf Station in town. They had three daughters. Douglas passed away in 2010 and is buried at Lamoille View Cemetery. Mildred still resides in their house on Hogback Road.

Helen Whiting was born in Minnesota in 1931. The family moved back to Vermont, residing in Waterville. Helen graduated from Cambridge High School. In 1956 she married Kenneth Neill. He served as Johnson's Post Master from 1956 to 1978. They had three sons. Helen worked in the Johnson town office, serving the town for over 30 years. She was an auditor first, assistant town clerk and then served as our town clerk from 1987 until her retirement in 1999. Ken passed away in 2005 and Helen passed away in 2001, both are buried at the Lamoille View Cemetery.

Alice G. Whiting, the sixth child of Zach and Ellen, was born in Waterville in 1934. She graduated as valedictorian from Cambridge High School in 1952 and went on to earn her degree from Johnson State College in 1956. Alice was a long time educator. She was a kindergarten teacher and a first grade teacher. Any child that had her as a teacher truly remembers her. She worked for 41 years as a professor in the education department at Johnson State College. In 2017 Alice was inducted into Vermont State College System Hall of Fame. She received The Jim Marvin Achievement Award in 2024.

Alice is one of the original members of the Johnson Historical Society and serves as the Membership Chair. Every week during the summer she makes her famous German Chocolate Cake for our booth at Tuesday Night Live. People are always there early to assure that they can have a piece of her cake. It goes without saying that Alice is a TREASURE! To know her is to love her. We all thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being in our lives. Alice and her dog Maggie reside on the Plot Road.

The last son we will focus on is Roland who was born in Mankato, Minnesota on June 20, 1904. Roland was schooled there and he helped his father with farming.



Roland Whiting Farm

Roland returned to Johnson and married Ruby Viola Davis on July 17, 1937. Three children were born to this union. Robert born in 1938, Anne born in 1941 and Mary born in 1944. The

Whiting's also had a foster child, Lorraine Flood, whom they raised from infancy. Roland was a farmer. Their family farm was off Gillen Avenue in East Johnson. The farm and house now belong to Vermont State University.

This completes the story that began in 1747 with the birth of Zachariah Whiting II, following his siblings and the many generations of Whitings who eventually settled in Johnson. We have come FULL CIRCLE!!

MEMORIAL GIFTS

The historical society has had several friends and relatives who have given gifts in memory of the special people listed below:

Keith and Marjorie Bradley
Phillip Thompson
Joann Dodge Perkins
Washer Family
Ramona McCuin

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT-- DICK SIMAYS

I hope everyone had an enjoyable Holiday season. As we enter a new year, we at the Historical Society look forward to repairing and improving the Holcomb House, furthering our collection of Johnson history, and greeting old and new friends who come to visit us. I ask all of you to please renew your memberships and if you are not a member, consider joining us. This history stuff is very interesting!

BOARD TRUSTEES:

Richard Simays, President
Mary Jean Smith, Vice President
Lois Frey, Secretary
Kelly Vandorn, Treasurer
Alice Whiting, Membership Chair
Linda Jones
Mike Dunham

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<https://johnsonhistoricalsociety.org/>

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HOLCOMB HOUSE OPEN HOURS

Second Friday of the month from
9am to noon
Fourth Sunday of the month from
1pm to 4 pm



Victorian Sofa which was in the parlor at the Stearns Homestead on Railroad Street. Donated by Bob and Kathleen Engstrom from Enosburg, Vt.

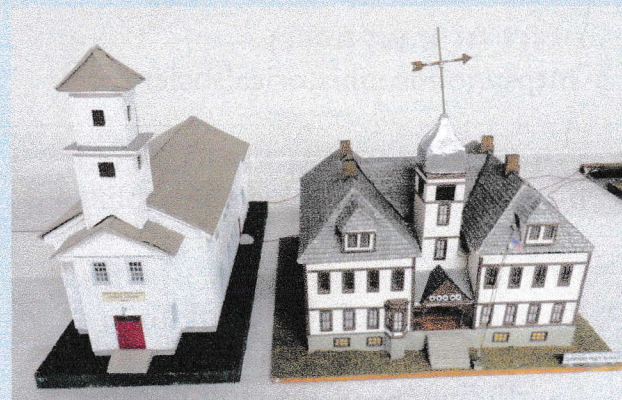
Models made by David Griswold



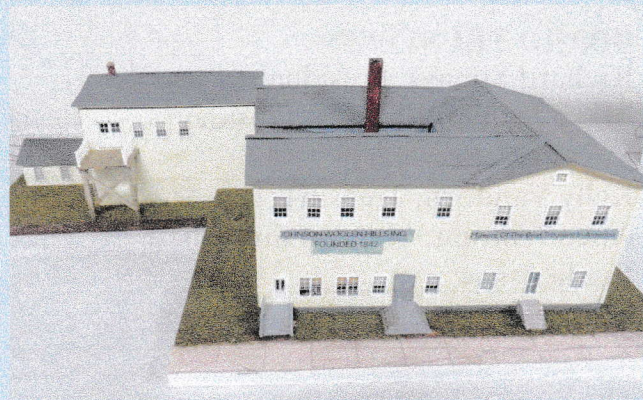
Nye Block, Beard's Hardware and Johnson Pharmacy



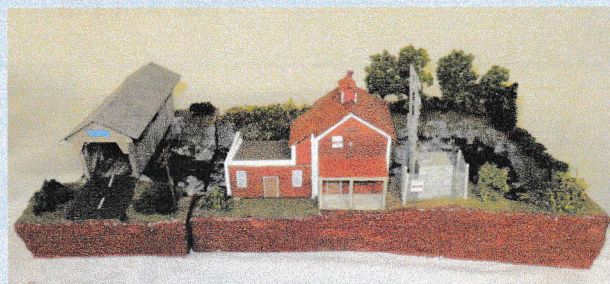
Talc Mill



Opera House and the School



Woolen Mill



Power House Bridge and Power Plant