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# GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Volume 28 Issue 1

Groton, Vermont 05046

Winter 2015

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1913 Stutz Bearcat—\$105,000

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### **COLLECTION OF HISTORIC AUTOMOBILES**

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Consider the strange story of Alex and Imogene Miller of East Orange, VT. They eked out an existence on a small farm. Alex would scrounge rusty nails from burnt buildings to repair his roof. He drove a ratty VW Beetle, and when it died, he found another even more ratty, and another...the rusting carcasses littered his yard. Alex died in 1993, and Imogene died in 1996. The local church took up a collection so they could be buried in the churchyard, and the state began the process of taking the farm for taxes. That would have been the end of a sad story, except... While preparing the estate for auction, the sheriff discovered a cache of bearer bonds taped to the back of a mirror. That triggered a comprehensive search of the house and outbuildings. The

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estate auction would eventually be handled by Christie's, and it would bring out collectors from all over the world.

It seems that Alex Miller was a Rutgers grad, son of a wealthy financier. He lived in Montclair , NJ , where he founded Miller's Flying Service in 1930. He operated a gyrocopter for mail and delivery service through the 30's. But the Millers had a secret, and they moved from Montclair when they needed room for it.

Choosing to live low profile, and paranoid about tax collectors, Miller moved to the farm in Vermont , and took his collections with him. Most of his cash had been exchanged for gold and silver bars and coins, which he buried in various locations around the farm. He carefully disassembled his gyrocopter, and stored it in an old one-room schoolhouse on his property. He then built a couple of dozen sheds and barns out of scrap lumber and recycled nails. In the sheds he put his collection.

Alex Miller had an obsession with cars. Not just any cars, but Stutz cars. Blackhawks, Bearcats, Super Bearcats, DV16's and 32's. He had been buying them since the 1920's. When Stutz went out of business, he bought a huge pile of spare parts, which was also carefully stored away in his sheds.

Sometimes he would stray, and buy other "special cars", including Locomobiles, a Stanley Steamer , and a Springfield Rolls Royce. He never drove them. He'd simply move them into his storage sheds in the middle of the night, each car wrapped in burlap to protect it from any prying eyes. Over the years, the farm appeared to grow more and more forlorn, even as the collection was growing.

Occasionally he would sell some parts to raise cash. Rather than dipping into his cache, he would labor for hours making copies of the original parts by hand.

Collectors knew him as a sharp trader, who had good merchandise but was prone to cheating. His neighbors had

no clue at all, they thought Alex and Imogene were paupers, and often helped out with charity.

The auction was a three day circus, billed as the "Opening of King Stutz Tomb." It attracted celebrity collectors, as well as thousands of curiosity seekers. The proceeds were in the millions, some items went for far more than their value in the frenzy. In the end, the IRS took a hefty chunk of the cash for back taxes, which proves the old adage about the only two sure things in life. [see pictures on pages 8 & 9]

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Do you have a collection relating to the history of Groton? Why not share it, or pictures of it, or stories about it, with the Groton Historical Society so others will be able to learn more about the history of Groton?

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## IN MEMORIAM



Eugene Puffer  
1929—2014



Christie Hersey  
1932—2014



Melvin Benzie  
1930—2014



Dorothy Main  
1916—2015

Condolences to the families of members Eugene Puffer, Christie Murray Hersey, Melvin Benzie, and Dorothy Pierce Main, who passed away November and December 2014 and January 2015. Their valuable contributions and services to the Groton Historical Society are greatly appreciated and they will be missed by everyone.

Excerpts from  
**THE CIVIL WAR**  
(As Recollected by an Ordinary Soldier)  
By  
Seth N. Eastman M.D. (1843-1913)

*In observance of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War another excerpt from Dr. S. N. Eastman's story is given here. The first ten excerpts about his experiences were in previous newsletters and covered his enlistment at St. Johnsbury to the battle of Gettysburg, being detailed as a nurse, and the winter of 1863—'64 at Brandy Station.*

Almost the whole army lay buried, but before long the men began to crawl out and trample down the snow. We could make no fires, as everything was too wet. We had no coffee that morning. We ate a few hardtacks and shook the snow out of our overcoats and blankets and packed them up as usual, and started on the march again, but the overcoats and blankets were very heavy from dampness and we had no chance to dry them for several days.

This snow all went away in a day or two, and the weather was very cold again, making us think of Napoleon's campaign to Moscow, when he was attacked by the infantry of the snow and the cavalry of the cold wind from the north, and driven in retreat from Moscow, losing almost his whole army. We were more fortunate and did not lose any men, but we retreated from Mine Run, marching all day and all night, and it was such a cold night that we built fires all along the road, and would stop to warm ourselves at these fires. All organization was lost, officers and men retreated in one confused mass. The only thing we tried to do was to keep from freezing, and it was sometime the next day, after this confused, cold, straggling march, that we arrived at the old camp at Brandy Station, Virginia, and quickly fixed up our quarters and had a sea-

son of rest. This unpleasant experience was soon forgotten, and we were again happy and contented.

Word was soon received from Headquarters that this was to be our winter quarters and we were to enjoy this pleasant camp for three or four months. We began to think of the comforts of home and of what our folks were enjoying during the Christmas Holiday, and some of the boys sent home for boxes of provisions and had pies and cakes and cooked chickens and turkeys sent to them so they could enjoy a diet better than the hardtack and pork and beans that the government supplied us with. Most of us liked whiskey and rum better than anything else that could be had from home, and one fellow that I knew very well by the name of Jay Sargent, told me he had sent home for two gallons of Medford Rum, and when it came we could have some of it. This looked to me like a fair proposition, so we watched the express office pretty close until it came, and we opened the box very quickly, not letting anybody else know its contents: as, if all knew about it, it would not last very long. I got one drink of it as we poured it out into a tin cup. I got a larger drink than I meant to, and the consequence was, I had the head-swing all day and the headache the next day. That was all I got out of it as, before I got around to want another dose, it was all gone. I don't think the rum made any disturbance, at least I never heard of any. I did not send home for any box, as I had no one at home that I thought would trouble themselves to pack and send me anything, so I put up with the army rations. All I had for Christmas was a big drink of Medford Rum.

My pard at this camp was George Lamphere from the town of Norwich, Vermont. I ought to speak of him, as he was a very fine fellow and always used me well, and did more than his part of the work in camp, such as getting the fuel, which we had to lug on our backs a long distance during the last of our stay at Brandy Sta-

*(Continued from page 5)* **civil war**

tion. Water, we had to go a quarter of a mile to get, with nothing to get it in but our canteens, so we had to go about twice a day for water. He was always well and appeared to have a very happy disposition. He always used me like I was his brother. He divided everything with me and I did with him. I don't think we ever had any hard feeling towards each other, and we were tent mates (or pards) as much as two years. He never shrank his duty and was always in his place in the ranks. When my time was out and I started for home, I felt bad to leave him. He had about a year to serve when my time was out. I gave him all of our belongings and everything I had that he could make use of. When I came away, I bade him good bye and never saw him again. He came out of the army all right, well and hearty, and got home to Norwich, Vermont. I meant to go and see him, but before I could get around to go, I heard that he was dead. He took some sickness after he got home, and died within a year, and so I never saw him again after I left him in camp on Cedar Creek about the 18th of October 1864, as that was the day I started for home. It was the day before the great battle on the 19th of October, 1864, called the Battle of Cedar Creek. So much for my tent mate, George Lamphere. My memory of him is of the most pleasant character, and all I can do to honor him is to mention his name in this writing and visit his grave, which I hope to be able to do before I get too old to visit anymore.

Our camp at Brandy Station being the most pleasant I had while in the Army, I intend to make a rude drawing of it and show the location of my tent and of the whole battalion, and leave it somewhere in this book.

Sometime during this winter, as time hung heavy on our hands, and, not having anything to do to relieve the monotony of the situation, I thought I would procure some whiskey and have a little fun. I knew they were selling whiskey at Corps Headquarters to of-

fficers only, so I went to our Captain and told him of the situation and asked him to lend me his coat and hat so that I might appear as an officer and be able to buy some whiskey. To this proposition he readily agreed, if I would get him some. I promised to get him a quart, and exchanged garments with him. He cautioned me to be very careful and not to bring him out. I agreed to this and started. I went back to my tent and rigged up as well as I could to appear like a Captain, as I had no insignia of that rank. This did not bother me much, as the coat and hat were exactly the right size. Taking a good trusty fellow with me, we borrowed the camp kettle, which would hold as much as six gallons, and started for Corps Headquarters. When we got there a whole lot of officers were waiting their turn. I fell in line with the kettle on my arm. I did not see anyone I knew, still I felt very shaky for fear someone would recognize me and get me into trouble, as well as the Captain, who had no right to lend us his coat for such a purpose, but no one said anything to me and when my turn came, I passed up the kettle and said I wanted four gallons of whiskey. The man that was putting the stuff up said, "All right, Captain", and took the kettle and filled the gallon measurer four times and put it into the kettle. He said it was eighty cents a gallon, so I paid him \$3.20 in our shin plaster, and my chum took hold on one side of the bail and I on the other, and made for my tent, which was as much as three quarters of a mile. No one said a word to me and I got back to my tent and put the kettle under my bunk, after filling a canteen for the Captain, I gave it to him with his coat and hat (so far, all was well). Then I sent word to my friends that I was going to celebrate awhile and to come and see me. The balance of the affair can be imagined better, than told here. That afternoon when the regiment went on Dress Parade, Company B only had ten men that could fall in, but the Orderly Sergeant in his report to the Adjutant, saluted as usual

*(Continued on page 10)*

## SOME OF MILLER'S CAR COLLECTION



1927 Stutz AA Sedan—\$65,000



Stutz DV32 Sedan—\$27,600



1931 SV16 Stutz Sedan—\$10,000



1929 Stutz Blackhawk Sedan— \$7,000

and said, "Company B all present or accounted for." There never was a word said about this affair. It all passed off smoothly, and the next day all was just the same as if it had never happened, but it was one of the wildest rackets that I ever saw while I was in the army, and I saw many from the same cause, and so did every other man who was in a volunteer regiment from the good old state of Vermont.

During the winter there were several snow storms, when as much as a foot of light snow would fall, and then there would be extensive games of snowball. One time in particular our regiment had a snowball battle with the 2nd Vermont Regiment that lasted as much as four hours, until the snow was all trampled down and thrown away, as there were hundreds engaged in it. We made charges and counter charges and advanced in regular order of battle, and had commanders. We took prisoners and did all the stunts that occur in a regular battle. I was so engaged in it I got sweaty and sat down in the snow and took a cold that caused me to have a severe run of pneumonia, and I had to lay in the hospital about three weeks. I had blisters on my chest and was very sick for a number of days as a result of the snowball battle. There were several other boys that got the same disease in the same way. One night when I was the worst, the wind came up and blew so hard that the tent I was in blew down on me and we had no shelter for awhile, but they got help and put the tent up again. I did not like the hospital and got out as soon as I could.

This snowball fight and snow storm happened about the last of March 1864, and my hospital experience was in April. I got out of the hospital and joined my company just in time to be in the great Battle of the Wilderness, which began the 5th day of May, 1864 and lasted three days.

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## NEW FAMILY NAMES IN 1860 CENSUS

There were twenty nine new family names in 1860 census of Groton that were not in earlier censuses. Earlier newsletters listed family names that first appeared in the 1790 to 1850 census records and they are summarized here. (\* indicates no additional information about the family in GHS records).

1790— Abbott, Bailey, Darling, Hosmer, James, Morse, Townshend

1800—Alexander, Batchelder, Emery, Frost, Gary, Gray, Hatch, Heath, Hill, Hooper, Knight, Lund, Macomber, Manchester, Martin, Morrison, Munro, Noyes, Phelps\*, Pollard, Remick, Taisey, Thurston, Welch

1810—Annis, Bennett, Bragden\*, Carter, Emerson, Fisk, Floyd\*, Fuller, Hidden, Hodsdon, Hogen\*, Jenkins, Littlefield\*, Low, Mallo-ry\*, McLaughlin, Nelson, Page, Parker, Paul, Renfrew, Rhodes, Roberts, Rowlin\*, Stanley, Vance, Weston, Whitcher

1820—Chase, Coffrin, Cunningham, Downs, Gile, Glover, Goodwin, Higgins, Huggins\*, Lyle, Marshall, McClary, Plummer, Richardson, Ricker, Sargent, Welton, Wilmot, Wilson, Wormwood

1830—Bellamy\*, Brown, Burnham, Clark, Dodge, Green, Hall, Kimball, Lathrup\*, Lewis\*, Randall, Rodger\*, Silver, Vennor

1840—Brickett\*, Buchanan, Corruth, Culver, Divoll, Dow, Dunn, Franklin\*, Furwell\*, Gates, Grant, Hadley, Jones, Joy, Moulton, Orr, Patterson, Peck, Philbrick, Scott, Weld, Wheeler, Whitehill, Wood

1850—Baldwin, Bean, Carpenter, Carrick, Cash, Craig, Cross, Foster, Gilbert, Hanson\*, Hodgman\*, Hubbard\*, Johnston, Leithead, Marting\*, McGen\*, Miller, Pane\*, Seaver, Stewart,

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### **New Family Names in 1860 Groton Census**

(\* indicates no additional family information in GHS Records)

**Adams, Moses** (1814-1893) his wife Emeline King and 5 of their children; his brother **John Quincy Adams** (1820-1887), his wife Elizabeth Wood and 2 of their children.

\***Bissell, J.** (age 40) Methodist clergyman living with Frank Heath.

**Burbank, David Atwood** (1816-1862), his wife Olive Smith and 4 of their children.

\***Chamberlin, Betsey** (age 61) living with Orrin Morrison family.

**Clough, Samuel B.** (1815-1882), his wife Mary Heath and 3 of their children.

\***Colby, Sara** (age 73) living with Jonathan J. Peck family.

**Crown, Calvin C.** (1823-1909), with his wife Betsey Morrison and 2 of their children; his brother **Moses Wesson Crown** (1824-1901) with his wife Margaret Whitehill and 3 of their children.

\***Dorr, William** (age 50) with his wife Lydia (age 44) and 4 children.

**Eggleston**, siblings **Henry Eggleston** (1849-1918) living with the Hugh Dunn family; and **Caroline "Carra" Eggleston** (1853-1933), **Joseph Eggleston**(1852-1896), and **Wallace Eggleston**(1857-?) living with George Whitehill family.

\***Flanders, J. P.** (age 38) his wife Hannah (age 26) and 5 children.

\***Gilchrist, Josiah** (age 50) living with Geo. Welch family, listed as farm laborer.

\***Graham, William** (age 44) living with Peter Paul family, listed as farm laborer.

**Harvey, John** (1798-1866), his wife Margaret Hight and 7 of their children.

**Hayes, William** (1826-1911), his wife Fanny Page and their son, William.

**Hood, Enos** (1807-?), his wife Chastine Stebbins and their 5

children.

\***Hoyt, Lois R.** (age 41) living with John Harvey family.

**Jackson, Charles** (1839-?) and his wife Alma Welch.

\***Kidder, Aaron** (age 45) and **Thomas** (age 41) probably brothers or cousins , living together and farming.

**Lamphere, Charles** (1830-1901), his wife Grace Latto and their 3 children.

\***Madge, William** (age 14) with Louisa Prior (perhaps his mother) living in Otis Hosmer family.

**Marsh, Josiah** (1811-1880), his wife Mary Brown and 3 of their children.

**McKay, D.** (age 65), his wife Lucy (age 65) and 8 children.

**Melvin, Cynthia (Silver)** (1825-?) and 2 children.

**Minard, Selden** (1816-1890), his wife Olive Frost and 4 children.

**Parker, Mary** (age 13) living with Otis Glover family.

**Pierce, Simon** (1786-?), his wife Lydia living with their daughter, Susan, and son-in-law, David Miller.

\***Prior, Louisa** (age 57) with William Madge (perhaps her son) living in Otis Hosmer family.

**Stebbins, Benjamin** (1801-?), his wife Lydia Crown and their daughter.

\***Waterman, Arvilla** (age 15) living with Hosea Welch II family.

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. Those with asterisks have not been connected with others having the same family name that appear later in Groton censuses. If any with asterisks are your relatives or you can connect them with later family members, please send the information to the Groton Historical Society or e-mail to [jwbenzie@mchsi.com](mailto:jwbenzie@mchsi.com) thank you. Any help to correct and update the family records for the Society will be appreciated.

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## GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Visit GHS Web page at Historical Society on <http://www.grotonvt.com/>

**Annual membership dues are payable for the calendar year**  
**Annual dues are \$10 for individuals and \$15 for families**  
**Lifetime Membership dues are \$100**

Your status is shown with your mailing address, please let GHS know if there is an error in our records of your membership status. Those getting only e-mail copies will be notified when their memberships are about to expire.

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All members who provide an email address will be sent a copy of the newsletter. If you want to opt out of getting a printed copy, please send a request to [jwbenzie@mchsi.com](mailto:jwbenzie@mchsi.com) This will save GHS the cost of printing and mailing. 17 members have elected to get only e-mail copies of the newsletter.

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Some projects at GHS are in need of updating! The burial records for Groton cemeteries have not been updated on the web site since Jim Dresser moved to Tennessee. Plans to record GPS coordinates for all the cemeteries has not been completed. An inventory of items donated to GHS with annual updates is still in progress. *Mr. Glover's Groton* published in 1978 is out of print and has been scanned by George Hall and the Society needs to decide about reprinting it, posting it on the GHS web site, and updating it. The Groton Family Records are an ongoing project that will never be completed, but they should be published or posted on the web site with periodic updates. The histories of Groton's Hydro-electric plants and Groton State Forest are in preparation by members Terry Reilly and Harry Chandler. Recruiting younger members to preserve the history of Groton for future generations is needed to ensure the future of GHS.

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Eileen Corcoran is the new Community Outreach Coordinator for the Vermont Historical Society replacing Laura Brill. Eileen will be available on Mondays and Tuesdays at the History Center in Barre to assist historical societies with their projects. Contact her at (802) 479-8522 or eileen.corcoran@state.vt.us

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How technology is changing the family tree

*Abstracted from a story on the internet by Ariel Bogle 1/28/2015*

America's obsession with genealogy, given a jump-start by Silicon Valley startups and new online platforms, has the potential to rework how we feel about inheritance, race, and family itself. But like all America's digital progress, it brings with it serious concerns about privacy and accuracy.

Two broad technical drivers are guiding the "new family tree." The first is the internet. Now you can put your family tree on collaborative genealogy sites like WikiTree, for example, and if it overlaps with another family tree, you can merge it until it becomes essentially an "Amazonian rain forest of relatives," – raising the possibility that a global family tree is not too far in the future.

The other significant contributors are companies like the controversial startup "**23andMe**" that make affordable home genetic tests that can reveal your ethnic makeup, among other personal markers.

Although technology is changing the way we discover our personal histories, the reasons why people begin to investigate in the first place have stayed the same - curiosity, of course, but also a sense of history.

Sensitivities around our sense of family and race make technology's impact on genealogy particularly fraught. New genetic tests, in particular, have the potential to show us that clear demarcations of ethnicity are basically a myth. This style of "new genealogy" shows we're all intertwined – it could really have a democratizing effect.

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