



*The Marlow Historical Society's mission is to preserve and illuminate Marlow's History*

**Winter 2021**

**FROM WESTERN WILDERNESS TO THE WOODS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE:  
ELGIN JONES AND THE ROOTS OF CAMP TAKODAH**

by J. Graeme Noseworthy\*

When a small summer camp opened in 1916 on Tolman Pond in Nelson, NH, it did so with a name and a motto that would resonate across the region and around the world for over a century. In fact, YMCA Camp Takodah was created from the start to be “friendly to all.”

The man who provided this foundation from which the camp would grow was a Marlow native named Elgin Alonzo Jones.

In the mid-1870s, Elgin, a vibrant, headstrong student at Dartmouth College, took a trip out west to visit the Sioux Indian Reservation in North Dakota. While he was there, he was deeply impressed by the native people and their inviting, almost magnetic culture. As his connection to the tribe became stronger and stronger, a plan started to form in Elgin’s imagination to carry the lessons he had learned forward and bring them home to Southern New Hampshire.

Upon graduation, Elgin established himself as a civil engineer, historian, and even the proprietor of an inn. As he became known in the area, the strings of local responsibility began to be pulled. In 1914, Elgin learned about a new YMCA that had been formed in Cheshire County. The organization’s focus was initially to provide young boys who had “nothing better to do” with some structured programs such as baseball clubs and Bible classes. They also set up a basic encampment on Swanzey Lake that summer so the boys could further the development of their “spirit, mind, and body” in a rustic setting of nothing but woods, water and the wild blue yonder. That spring, the Y’s first secretary, another dashing young graduate from Dartmouth College named Howard T. Ball, led fourteen boys and their leaders in what would come to be called “Camp Primitive.” They had very few creature comforts, limited equipment, bags of straw for beds, and canvas tents for cover. It was incredibly exciting for the boys who thought of themselves as pioneer explorers of the great outdoors.

The following March, Elgin was asked to join the Cheshire County YMCA Board of Directors, a position he would serve in for over ten years. As he attended meetings, the plan and thoughts he had formulated decades prior while immersing himself in native cultures began to come into focus. When Howard abruptly resigned after camp in late July 1915, everything seemed to stop even though the Y had, essentially, just started to develop. There were no more clubs. No classes. No trips. No idea of how or where they would have an encampment the following summer. Nothing.

Elgin, ever present and always thinking, knew it was time to act. In early 1916, he created a comprehensive plan for a camping services program to be implemented by the Y. Remembering what he had learned out west, Elgin modified and rearranged the letters of “Dakota” and named the camp “Takodah.” He also borrowed a Sioux Chief’s profile image to use in its logo and declared that the three-word motto – and the fundamental policy that would echo across generations of Takodians - would be “friendly to all.”

His plan was presented to the Cheshire County YMCA Board, voted on, and adopted on March 16th. In that moment, Camp Takodah was born and, eventually, Elgin would be known among the program staff and campers as “Takodah Dad.”

With Howard gone, however, the Y had to find a new site to develop Elgin’s program. Elgin and Robert C. Woodward, a Y board member from Dublin, NH, got to work and quickly found a new location for two weeks of camping on Tolman Pond in Nelson, NH. Elgin personally negotiated the lease of the land and provided the first flag of the United States that Takodah would have among its official possessions. The program stipulated that boys could attend for one or two weeks and they were responsible for bringing their own equipment including knives, forks, spoons, plates, and cups. Each tent group was supplied with a dishpan for washing and another one for rinsing, along with towels for drying the dishes. All of the work was done by campers, as part of their “instruction.” The fee for them to attend was a whopping \$1 per day!

It had all gone quite well. But after having spent a few summers on Tolman Pond, Elgin, along with the Board of Directors and Daniel E. Lorentz, the second Secretary of Cheshire County YMCA, knew it was finally time to grow beyond the limitations they faced in the relatively small plot of land in Nelson. Daniel had successfully demonstrated that he could generate sufficient interest for a county-wide camp and the path to expansion was clear. And so, during the autumn of 1918, the search for a new site was on. A property committee was formed with several of the Directors, including Elgin. Their singular task was to locate a suitable location that was “bigger and better” and would allow Takodah to develop its program, establish new traditions, and grow for decades to come.

Soon after, they discovered a plot of sixty acres in Richmond, NH owned by a Keene veterinarian named Dr. B. C. Russell.

The plot consisted of thirty acres of wooded land with “a marvelous hemlock grove on a hill” overlooking an additional thirty acres of pristine water that connects to Tully Brook and Royalston Falls. It had one permanent building, with no power or plumbing, and one small open space for sports and play. Other than that, there was nothing more than a short, unremarkable dirt road in the woods in a little town rarely visited by those who lived in and around Keene. In fact, just a few months prior, Dr. Russell had tried to sell the property to a private school for boys based in St. Louis but those plans never materialized. They simply didn’t think they could do much with the land and they were concerned that the cost of development would be too high.

And so, Dr. Russell’s lack of luck quickly became the Y’s very good fortune. Elgin, a man of vision and promise, could see past the site’s humble status to a place of potential growth and permanence for the program he had created from scratch.

On March 16, 1919, Elgin and his fellow board members cast a vote to lease 60 acres starting that summer with an option to buy the plot the following year. The vote was unanimous. The die was cast. The roots were finally laid. Elgin’s vision that had been formed out west in the native wilderness was quickly becoming a reality at home in the Richmond woods.

After the first successful camping season at the new site, it was clear to Elgin that Takodah was there to stay. On August 10, 1919, he recommended to the Board that the Y take “full responsibility for the ownership and operation of camping programs and raise the funds necessary to purchase the property.”

That is precisely what occurred. Elgin surveyed the site (some of his original maps and markers are still in use today) and helped oversee the formal closing of the purchase in January 1920. Always creating solutions for any challenge laid before him, he also struck an agreement with Keene Gas & Electric to harvest dead chestnut trees off the property so they could be used as telephone poles to help pay off the mortgage. The surplus was earmarked for future development on the site and Elgin would eventually use those funds to acquire twelve additional acres to “protect our rights,” as he put it.

Since that time, the site has grown to over five hundred acres.

But Elgin’s efforts at camp go far beyond the lines of the property. In April 1924 he agreed to secure a new piano for the Mess Hall to encourage and develop the tradition of singing during each mealtime cleanup. That upright would eventually be moved to the “new” Dining Hall, built in 1928, where it would be played for many decades to come. Campers and staff still sing during cleanup after each meal.

He also helped to build cabins and other buildings, some of which are still in use today. He improved our facilities, raised substantial amounts of money, performed various engineering and environmental studies, and sprinkled his ideas and personality into the traditions that Takodians would all come to know and love.

In 1925, Elgin wrote a song for Camp that was sung after meals and during Chapel services for over 50 years. In fact, the song is still performed by some of Takodah’s more seasoned alumni and a plan is in the works to bring it back to being sung regularly at camp as early as the summer of 2021.

**Zoe Moe Sas Agapo**  
(By my soul, I love you)

From the friendships that we make	Camp Takodah, when away
In our camp on Takodah Lake,	You will come in thought and stay,
From the aid our friends provide;	Bringing memories of the past,
Thrives Takodah, our great pride.	Such as shall forever last;
Zoe moe sas agapo.	Will we e’er forget thee? No!
Hence this song that all may know,	Zoe moe sas agapo,
Zoe moe sas agapo.	Will we e’er forget thee? No!
	Zoe moe sas agapo.

When Elgin passed away on March 14, 1939, word spread quickly throughout the Cheshire Y’s community, even though they were still in the midst of rebuilding after the Great New England Hurricane which devastated the region just six months prior. A moment of silence was observed by the Board at their next meeting, official notations were added to the records and Takodians attended his memorial service and burial in Marlow. In some little but meaningful ways, Camp was never quite the same again. His legacy lives on, of course, in the name which “marks evermore the place we take for our home.” Will we e’er forget thee, Elgin? No!



*\*J. Graeme Noseworthy is the Vice President and Historian of the Takodah YMCA in North Swanzey, NH. After being a camper in the 1980s and a volunteer since 2010, he is focused on helping to guide the organization into the next century. Graeme lives in Leominster, MA with his wife, two boys (also Takodians), and two dogs. During the week he works as Visual Events and Marketing Director at IBM. His published research projects include *The Lost Takodians of the Second World War*, and *The Transformation of Camp Takodah after the Great New England Hurricane of 1938*. Graeme is honored to contribute this article to *The Marlow Historical Society*.*

## CHARLIE

by M. Baril



Charlie, his mother, Martha, and sister Barbara

Charles Berton Strickland was born on January 26, 1926 in Watertown MA. His mother, Martha Lucy Upit, had heard the allegations against Marlow doctor William Robb, and decided it was safer to have the baby in her hometown. Martha originally came to the US from Riga, Latvia, when she was 5.

Charlie and his younger sister Barbara grew up in the house that is now 119 NH Route 123. He went to elementary school in Marlow and on to Vilas High School, where he met his future wife Frances Perham.

His father Berton was a quiet fellow, Charlie recalls, and a good mechanic; he operated the Marlow Garage, which was located where the fire department is now, and later on Rt. 10 when the bypass was completed. Charlie remembers that his mother would go pump gas to help out.



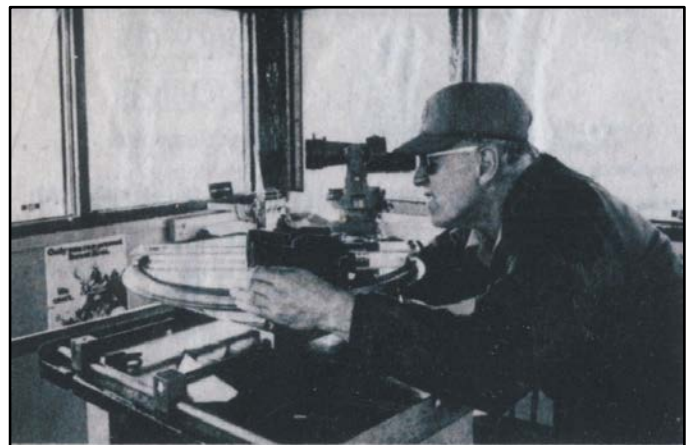
Charlie and Frannie

After serving in Navy submarines during WWII Charlie married Frannie; and in 1948 he put in the winning bid for a house in the village, which would be their forever home, and where they raised three sons. He operated the Marlow Garage, after working in it for years with his father.



Bert Strickland - 3<sup>rd</sup> from left - Marlow Garage - 1940's

At various times through the decades he has been road agent, sexton, town and school moderator, selectman, and fire chief; special deputy warden, forest fire warden for the town, and watchman on the Pitcher Mountain fire tower. He has served on the school board, planning board, and zoning board of adjustments. He was NH DOT Dispatcher, and security guard for PC Connection. An avid hunter for many years, he served as NH Fish & Game Hunter Safety Instructor. Most notably, he was instrumental in getting the first ambulance for the town, and became an EMT. For 35 years Charlie was Cooperative Observer for the National Weather Bureau. As part of a network of volunteer weather observers throughout the nation, he would monitor daily weather, using a variety of instruments, recording the highest and lowest temperatures and precipitation amounts for a 24 hour period, usually at 7:00am.



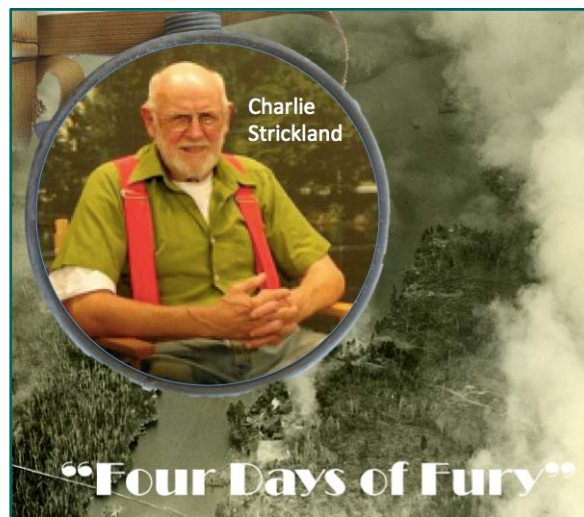
Charles Strickland in Pitcher Mountain fire tower



It was during his term as Noble Grand of the Odd Fellows Forest Lodge in 2005 and 2006 that an addition with a bathroom was built in the back of the building, and the wood-burning furnace was replaced. In later years he even mowed the grass around the Lodge, Murray Hall, and other public areas.

As an impressionable 15-year old, Charlie witnessed the devastating Fire of 1941, and worked alongside his fireman-father pumping water out of the Ashuelot River. Many years later he cooperated with Tracy Messer in creating a documentary film about the event, which has played to multiple audiences through the years. His prodigious memory makes him to this day the town's unofficial historian.

In the mid sixties, Charlie joined the Shanty Town Four band and kept up his father Bert's tradition of dances at the Grange Hall. He played the drums, with Jim Reavis from Charlestown on the guitar, Dale Wilson of Alstead on the banjo, and Langdon's Rodney Campbell Sr. on the accordion. They played at numerous venues in Cheshire County and Vermont, and at many Old Home Days and other town events. Sometimes Marek Bennett and Robert "Chops" Polcari joined in playing the guitar after Jim Reavis passed away in 1986; and Rodney Campbell Jr. took his father's place on the accordion.



Did age slow Charlie down? Not quite! Always upbeat, he would zip around town on his electric wheelchair, or his John Deere Gator, usually with his dogs Marvin or Ellie riding shotgun. Jen Brown says he would pull up to the library on his wheelchair, ring the bell for her to open, and then entertain her with anecdotes and go home with an armful of books. She figures he must have read a book a day.

I've used the past tense in the last paragraph, because Charlie is not in Marlow anymore; he is at Maplewood Retirement Home in Westmoreland. It's only a few miles away, and we can go visit him; but for some of us Marlow without Charlie is not quite the same. This article is meant as a respectful and affectionate tribute to a very special friend.



### A Childhood Memory of Charlie

by Chuck Mosher

Charlie organized a Boy Scout troop in Marlow when I was about eight years old (around 1954). One of our first activities was a camping trip to Big Pond, that area of the Ashuelot River just below town as it turns away from Route 10. I'd never been camping, but I loved being outdoors, and the prospect of cooking our meals outside and sleeping under the stars kept me awake for days! I remember having the standard issue Boy Scout canteen, utensil set and knapsack, and my folks bought me a warm wool sleeping bag for the trip. The weather looked good, so I didn't have a tent, but I'm pretty sure Charlie had one, as befitting the Scout Master.

We crossed over from the East Shore to the West Shore of Big Pond in a rowboat and a couple canoes, and were "pitching camp" by early afternoon. I picked out a level spot with lots of pine needles beneath and spread out my sleeping bag in preparation. It looked perfect, and we all gathered firewood while Charlie prepared a fish chowder for dinner. Milling around the fire while we waited for dinner, I decided I'd chosen a good spot, so I wandered over and crawled in feet first, WITH MY MUDDY BOOTS STILL ON! It felt good and I was

pretty sure that I was going to be warm and happy.

After dinner and clean up, we stoked the campfire, told stories, and as the fire burned down, began to wander off to our chosen sleeping spots. I slipped off my boots and socks, got on my sleeping clothes, and as I crawled in, I realized the entire sleeping bag was full of wet mud and dirt! It was IMPOSSIBLE to get comfortable! I tried shaking out the bag, but the mud and dirt stuck tightly to the wool, and "miserable" doesn't begin to describe my night. Finally, after several sleepless hours, I gave up, crawled out of the bag, put on my clothes and boots and decided I'd just go fishing. Everyone else was asleep, and I thought I'd been pretty quiet, but as I sat on a rock at the edge of the Pond, fishing for horned pout, Charlie came up and quietly sat down beside me. He asked if I was OK, and I tried to explain without sounding as foolish as I felt. He laughed, said "that kind of thing happens to everybody", and sat fishing with me until the sun came up over the hills. I'm pretty sure that situation isn't covered in the Scout Masters' Manual, but he instinctively knew how to lead, how to parent, and how to earn the lifelong trust and respect of a young man!

## THE LAST OF THE DOWNINGS

David Downing, who was born in Newburyport, MA in 1738 and died in Marlow in 1798, was the first of five generations of Downings to own land south of the village. He was a ship carpenter, and was wounded in the French and Indian War. He had two children: Samuel (1761-1867), who was the last surviving veteran of the Revolutionary War, and Daniel (1763-1798) who also fought in the war for independence.

Daniel settled in Antrim, married and moved to Marlow, bringing his parents and his only child, James, with him. The Gazetteer of Cheshire County says "he located a little way off from Road 30" (southern part of Route 10). James in turn reared a family of eight children. One of them, Daniel (1811-1885) moved in the last years of his life to a house in the village, where he and his wife Lucy died (The house would later be the home of Charlie and Frannie Strickland.).

Another son, James Jr. (1815-1895) married Electa Foster, and according to the Gazetteer "he purchased the Phelps place on Road 30". A 1906 map shows their home to be at the location that is now 192 NH Rt. 10. They had four children, Albert, George, Herbert, and Ellen.



Ellen on left. Herbert seated.

Heman Chase, eminent land surveyor from East Alstead, wrote a poignant story about the last surviving Downings, Herbert and Ellen, in his book ***More Than Land - Stories of New England Country Life and Surveying***. With permission from his daughters, Margaret and Ellen, we transcribe the chapter, "Planned Economy", verbatim:

*The Downing Place had once been quite an establishment - a large farm for its day - with sheep and cattle, pastures and mowings, a maple sugar house, sugar lot and woodlot, and - half a mile down the river - a water-powered sawmill. But in the past thirty years or so the road passing the place had changed. From just a town road of dirt and mud, used mostly by neighbors' teams, it had become a busy black-topped thoroughfare, on which there whisked past an alien and oblivious world. In the meantime, the life of the old place shrank down to a minimum of household activities of a quiet and aged pair - the last of the Downings - Ellen and her brother Herbert.*

*Herbert never spoke; he had been mute from birth. Now he was the docile object of Ellen's loving care, and she helped him dress, directed him at meals and bedtime, and throughout the day told him which of the few simple chores to do next. She probably gained much psychic support from always consulting him on matters that a man on a farm would naturally manage, but, getting no response, of course, would then always follow her own judgement.*

*Early one fall, a kind neighbor decided it would be too much for Herbert this year to saw up the Downings' winter's wood - as he had always done, by hand with a bucksaw. So the neighbor hired me with my portable engine and saw rig and two helpers to come and do the work all up at once.*

*One clear, cold day in late October we came to the Downing Place. We maneuvered the saw rig into position beside a long pile of four-foot wood, convenient for sawing and throwing into the open shed. But as we were about to start up the engine, a question arose regarding the cord or so of dry wood already in the back of the shed. So I went into the house to ask.*

*As I entered the kitchen - always the most active room in any New England farm house - Ellen was sitting in the sun by the window, watching operations at the shed across the driveway; Herbert was at the sink on the north side of the room wiping dishes. As I spoke to the two old people, she alone responded, but with a lively nod and friendly greeting. It was evident to me, who had never seen them before, that she was the one to be consulted, so I said, 'Miss Downing, what about that dry wood in the back of the shed. Wouldn't you like it piled by the door to use first?'*

*'Well, I'll have to ask Herbert about that', she said, and facing about, called, 'Herbert! Herbert, you come here!'*

Slowly he turned, and, with plate and towel in hand, shuffled in felt slippers over to stand by her side, where she took his arm, gently pulled him closer and drew his head down to her and shouted in his ear, 'Herbert, Mr. Chase wants to know what to do with the old wood at the back of the shed. You want it saved out?'

He gazed down at her; gradually he turned his benevolent eyes in my direction, then slowly looked to her once more. No sound from him, no visible reply of any kind could have been detected by a waiting world in that long moment of respectful silence and close attention.

Finally, as his gaze turned toward the floor, Ellen looked up to me, and with a nervous jaw and blinking eyes, said, 'I think Herbert has a plan about that wood: he'll use it just's it comes.'

**Heman Lincoln Chase III** was born in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1901, his mother a teacher and father a medical doctor. In 1910, his mother and stepfather, Hartley Dennett, and her children, Heman and Mary, moved to the Brick House in Mill Hollow, Alstead. There Dennett, an architect, purchased and razed the crumbling Messer saw mill and built the present mill on its site - Chase's Mill. This building project was of great fascination to Heman, and the letters the family wrote him when away at school describe much of that project. Heman attended the University of Wisconsin, becoming a civil engineer. Land surveying became his life work.

In 1933 he married Edith Newlin, a teacher and writer for children. They built a house in Mill Hollow where they raised their two daughters and became active community members. He and his wife inspired the local community with their writings - poetry and prose - and their education of youth at their operating mill. While not a part of his livelihood, the mill always remained an important force in his life, serving as workshop where he designed and built a number of practical items, invited area children to come in to learn woodworking, invited people to come for neighborhood gatherings of many kinds and demonstrated water power to anyone who came along. Under the stewardship of the Mill Hollow Heritage Association, Chase's Mill has been undergoing a remarkable restoration since 2016.

Along with his business partner, Halley Whitcomb, Heman Chase was actively surveying in the area almost until the end of his long life. He died in Bellows Falls, VT, on March 31, 1988 at the age of 86. He had many good friends in Marlow, and surveyed 24 Marlow properties.

**We have in our files a letter from Ellen Downing (1865-1949) to Heman Chase, written from Keene, and dated March 1, 1943.**

Dear Mr. Chase:

Thank you for your interesting letter. It was a great surprise. I had entirely forgotten about the old saw blade, but am glad to know it is in the museum. If I remember right I told you to have it labeled that it came out of the old Downing sawmill in Marlow - for I am sure that is where it came from. Of course I had to break up my home after my brother was gone, and thought best to leave town as there was no place in Marlow where I wanted to stay. Spent the first winter in Marlboro, but have been in Keene since. Have been obliged to move several times which I don't like. Where I am now is a first class boarding place and the only drawback is that it is a mile from the city square and too

far for me to walk up and down the hill. Can get some chances to ride but not always when I would like to go. Have got along very well, but you can imagine it is not like having a home of my own. My father built the house on the farm in Marlow where I was born and lived 75 years, so I am 77 now. My brothers built the big barn. I am glad to hear about your little girls.

Sincerely yours,  
Ellen C. Downing

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Keene N.H. Mar. 1, 1943.  
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## THE HEARSE HOUSE

At the 1846 Town Meeting, Marlow residents approved Warrant Article #16 authorizing the building of a hearse house. It was finally built in 1856, and it stood, according to Elgin Jones, on the division line between the "new" (1856) and "old" (1819) sections of the cemetery. It was relocated for a time to a spot at the south west corner of the old section, and finally moved across the street to its present site, on land purchased from heirs of Herbert Weeks.

In accordance with a vote at the 1982 Town Meeting, the Town of Marlow sold the Hearse House and the land it occupies to The Marlow Historical Society for the amount of \$1.00, with the provision that, should the Society cease to exist, the property would revert back to the town. The Quitclaim Deed dated May 7, 1984 was signed by Selectmen Robert W. Rieseberg, Joseph N. Feuer, and John J. McCabe Jr. Margery G. Davis was Justice of the Peace; and Witness for the signees was Frances R. Strickland.

Housed within the shed were the summer and winter hearses, one on wheels and the other on sleds.\* It also stores the old pumper, which dates from 1913 and played an important role in the Fire of 1916, and the windlass from the old slaughterhouse off Lewis Road, which was donated to the Historical Society by Dr. Arthur Cohen in 2013.\*\*

In 2007 the Historical Society selected the painting and repair of the Hearse House as its annual project. Bucky White scraped, primed and painted it. At the time it was noted that the supports for the back of the structure would need realignment.

This year we have undertaken a thorough rehabilitation. At their August 11 meeting, Board members voted to replace the two back pillars.



One was promptly replaced because it was tilting, and the building was shored up in several places for maximum stability. The second pillar will be replaced next year, as it is still sound and not in danger of failing.

New boards were installed at the drip line on three sides of the structure. Finally it has been painted, and the roof has been re-shingled. We thank Bob Boivin for providing the boards, which he milled himself; and to Bob, Joe Baril and Sydney Willis for working on the pillar. In a year that has seen significant restoration work done on some of Marlow's historic buildings, it was fitting that the Hearse House too should receive much needed attention.

\* With the help of volunteers the summer hearse was moved to the Historical Society Museum in Murray Hall in 2015, and the winter hearse in 2020.

\*\*See our Autumn 2013 newsletter.

### SNOWS OF LONG AGO

Walter and Kenneth Andrews are the two oldest children of Roddy Andrews and Lillian Ramsdell. The photo was taken around 1914. They are playing with the Tinkers' dog, probably someplace near the Tinker Store, which burned in 1916.



### ELITE

Call us picky if you will, but our Historical Society doesn't often confer the title of Honorary Member. In this special group are:

**Charlie Strickland** - our one and only Charlie, who has a special place in Marlow's heart.

**Tracy Messer** - peerless scholar of Marlow history, who is utterly devoted to the town.

**Stephanie Tickner** - our cheerful volunteer, whose artistry and skill are evident in every newsletter, and indeed in every Historical Society project she undertakes.

**Ed and Joanne Thomas** - active in the Society even after they moved away in 2016; Joanne as vice-president, president, and writer; Ed as a "man for all seasons," equally adept up on a ladder as behind a camera.

To all of them we extend our gratitude and affection.



**Marlow Historical Society**  
Founded in 1976

**President - Maria M. Baril**  
**Vice President - Ed Reardon**  
**Secretary - Patty Little**  
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**We thank you for your continuing support, and send best wishes for the new year.**

*Photo by Stephanie Tickner - Gustin Pond, Marlow*