

MHS Newsletter

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

Winter 2016

Memories of The Christmas Trees Inn

The Christmas Trees Inn has long been an impressive Marlow landmark. Built about 1833, it was originally the home of the Farley family, and headquarters for their successful ink and extract company in the mid 1800s. It was later purchased by the Hon. James M. Burnap, prominent Marlow citizen, successful businessman and state senator, who is also remembered as "the Father of the Marlow Grange."

In the spring of 1954, Sam Wren and his wife Virginia Sale Wren were driving through Marlow on their way to Hanover where their son Christopher attended Dartmouth College. They saw the mansion, and taking the FOR SALE sign quite literally, they purchased the property.

Sam Wren was an actor and director. His wife, younger sister of popular vaudeville star Chic Sale, was a versatile actress active in theater, movies, radio and television, and famous for her one-woman show: the "Americana" series of character sketches.

The Wrens set upon renovating the building; they had it painted bright red with white trim, and called it The Christmas Trees Inn for the two large evergreens in the front yard, which they lit with colored bulbs. The building was originally painted green, so, after their new color scheme, the locals referred to the place as "the red green house". They advertised: "Luscious farm food; beautiful guest rooms - a truly delightful vacation place for a meal, overnight, a week, or the season."

Mrs. Wren regularly attended Sunday services at the Marlow church, and she participated in the annual Old Home Day celebrations doing several of her vignettes.

Unfortunately the Inn did not turn out to be a profitable business. We have in our files a narrative written by Rev. Fay Gemmill, who was then pastor of the Grace Methodist Church in Keene, and of the Marlow and Munsonville churches, and a good friend of the Wrens at the time when they owned the inn. He speculates that besides the fact that the prices were not high enough, the Wrens probably "took in down-and-out, old theater friends from shows which didn't make it. Looking back, Virginia allowed that several 'stayed too long a spell' often not entirely settling up when they finally did leave."

Two Marlow ladies, Susan Rock and Emily Bomely, worked at the Inn when they were young. Following are their personal recollections, which paint a vivid portrayal of both the Wrens and the Inn.

EMILY:

"I started working at the Christmas Trees Inn the summer of 1958. Rosie Willis was working there that summer too. When she left to marry Charlie Elliott, Susan came on board.

Mrs. Wren was a sweet lady. I was only 14 and needed working papers. Since my mother didn't drive, she offered to drive us over to Walpole to get the papers.

We made 50 cents an hour, plus tips, and we thought we were rich. We were responsible for waiting tables at breakfast, lunch and dinner, washing dishes, and cleaning the guest rooms. We usually had some time off between meals.



Dinner was served buffet style: sliced ham, roasted turkey and side dishes. Mrs. Wren and Susan's mom made the pies. We had Christmas china on the tables, and we wore white uniforms with red Christmasy organza aprons made by Mrs. Wren.

The Inn opened for the season in the spring and remained open until the end of hunting season. We had many interesting guests. We had the Connelys, who bought the brick house at the top of Fox Hill in the early 1960s - a lovely family, they were with us for five weeks while their house was refurbished. They left a \$150.00 tip for the two of us; we were thrilled. Jim Tillinghast also stayed at the Inn while in the process of buying what he turned into the Marlow Gun Shop at the top of Gee Hill. There were many guests who came back year after year and became like family.

The Wrens had a rowboat docked just across the street on the Ashuelot, for the enjoyment of the guests. We had a croquet set on the lawn, and it was also used for dining al fresco; now there was a word for us young Marlow girls to learn!

The Wrens were wonderful people. We called Mr. Wren "Boss". "Yes, sir, Boss" was our favorite expression. At the end of one summer the Wrens told us we could invite our special friends from Sand Pond for a sit down dinner. They prepared a wonderful meal with ice cream sundaes for dessert. They served us. What a treat!

There are a lot of funny anecdotes about two innocent girls working at the Inn. One in particular goes like this: Susan and I had served breakfast as everyone had left for the day, or so we thought. We went upstairs to make the beds. There was a bedroom at the end of a long corridor; the couple hadn't closed their door and wellyou know the rest.

(Continued, Page Three)

**DO YOU EVER
WONDER WHERE
LOCAL SITES GOT
THEIR NAME?**

CAMERON ROAD, for example - the unpaved road off Route 123 right above Telephone Road - was named after Cal (Caleb W.) Cameron.

Cal was a well known resident of Marlow, and writer of travel columns for the Keene Sentinel: "Your New England", and "Let's Go Driving". He was an active member of the Historical Society of Cheshire County, and of Marlow's Odd Fellows Lodge. He played the piano, and participated in musical shows in town.

Mr. Cameron was instrumental in getting the state to officially designate Rt. 32 from Swanzey to Athol Mass., as "The Old Homestead Highway".

His brochure MARLOW N.H. 1761-1961 is a great source of information, and people often use it in their research.

He died in Marlow in 1963 at the age of 69.

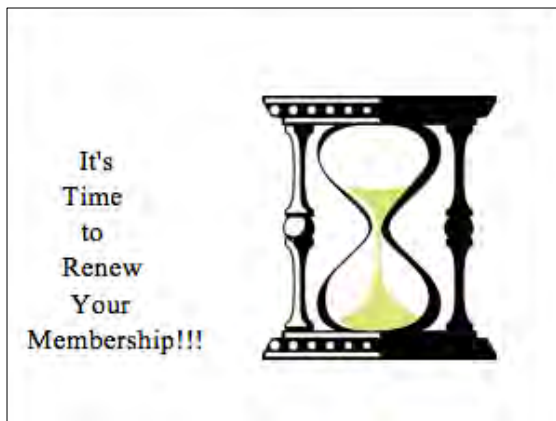
A gentleman named Phinehas Stone gave **STONE POND** its name. The Genealogy and History of New Hampshire and its Counties, transcribed by Janice Brown, mentions that around 1805 Phinehas Stone established a tannery near the schoolhouse in District No. 7. Page 67 of our Marlow History lists the Phineas (no 'h') Stone tannery at "Stone Pond".

Local historian Loisanne Foster surmises that since hemlock bark was used in the tanning process, Mr. Stone probably harvested hemlock for that purpose, and most likely kept the logs in Stone Pond until he was ready to use them.

Phinehas Stone was the grandfather of Harriet Adelaide Fiske, wife of Marlow's Civil War surgeon, Dr. Marshall Perkins.

He and his wife, Sarah, are buried in the Village Cemetery. His tombstone reads: "An honest man is the noblest work of God."

Who knows - maybe some day a Marlow site will bear your name!!



Maria Calista Huntley

A fascinating Cinderella story in Marlow history is that of Maria Calista Huntley. Born April 11, 1841, she was the daughter of Russell and Amy Huntley. At an early age she displayed great singing talent, and made her first public appearance at age 12.

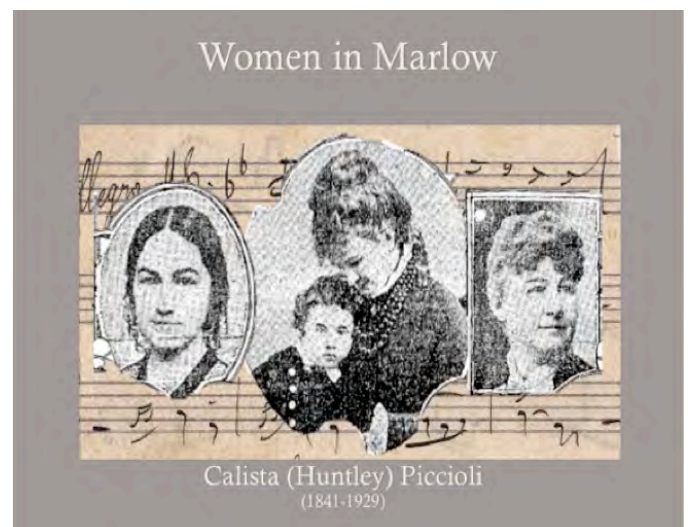
Her family, however, was not wealthy, so when they moved to Lynn, Mass. she went to work as a binder in a shoe factory in order to earn enough money to study music in Boston.

She debuted at Boston Music Hall and became a soloist with church choirs. It was then that she captured the attention of famous musical figures of the time, who made it possible for her to study in Europe.

Maria Calista became one of the world's most celebrated prima donnas of the nineteenth century. She toured Europe and South America, and sang for most of the European monarchs. As David R. Proper wrote in an 1989 Keene Sentinel article: "She received public acclaim, rave notices and praise from critical musical audiences around the world."

She married Italian tenor Girolamo Piccioli in 1869, and they had one son. She retired prematurely, perhaps due to impending deafness, although she continued to sing with church choirs in New York, Boston and Lynn. Maria Calista died in Lynn in 1929, at age 90.

To quote David Proper: "The concert artist remembered the village of her early childhood and revisited it in later years...Here is another of the almost forgotten stories of success by Cheshire County natives. While she never forgot her N.H. birthplace, it may have seemed to have forgotten her in some measure." Stay tuned for further articles about Calista, as we do more research on this Marlow celebrity from long ago.





Sue said to me "Hit the floor". We crawled the length of the hallway, and ran down the back stairs to the kitchen. "Boss, Boss, you won't believe what we just saw!" Mr. Wren swore us to secrecy; he didn't want that getting around Marlow. There was a switch in the hallway between the dining room and the gift shop, to light the trees out front at dusk. We were always asking the Boss if we could turn the lights on - he didn't like them on too long to save electricity.

It was a wonderful place to work. I was there until the summer of 1962 when I graduated from high school. Other Marlow girls helped out when we were busy: Kathy Andrews, Chrissy Aho, and Margie Mansell from Stoddard."

SUSAN:

"Both Mr. and Mrs. Wren were sweet on us, and we could get away with just about anything - like jumping on the beds before we made them! Our friends from Sand Pond - mostly boys - would stop by to visit us at the back door. Mr. Wren would shoo them away and tell us to get back to work. He always had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth with ashes an inch long.

I remember the "undercover" sundaes. We would make a mound of ice cream with hot fudge sauce and one of us would eat while the other distracted the boss. Of course he knew what was going on and I think got a big kick out of us.

One autumn day Emily and I were a little bored between meals, so we decided to make a pumpkin pie. There were no recipe books; all we knew was what we saw our mothers do. So we cut up a pumpkin and put it in a pressure cooker. When we figured it was

done we opened the cover, and since we didn't know about releasing the pressure, it exploded!



top photo: Christmas Trees Inn Circa 1963

left: Sam, Ginny, Christopher, and Virginia Wren, 1960's.

right: Christmas Trees Inn from the air, seen from behind the mill complex

There was pumpkin everywhere: ceiling, walls, floor. We were sliding all over the floor on it, and around the corner comes the "boss" shouting: "What was that noise!" We managed to convince him it was nothing - we must have been great actresses. Anyway, he left and we scraped the walls, cleaned the floor and made a pie. Since there was almost no pumpkin left in the cooker after the explosion, you can guess where the pumpkin for the pie came from.....The ceiling was hopeless; I wouldn't be surprised if there is still some pumpkin there under layers of paint.

One day we were serving a large party in the front dining room. Dinner was a buffet, but we served the first course, which was usually onion soup in little green cups with like saucers. I managed to spill one of those cups down a lady's neck. Somehow we both lived through it. Apparently the soup was not that hot as she did not get burned.



Dorothy Dodge, Unknown, Ginny Wren, Sam Wren

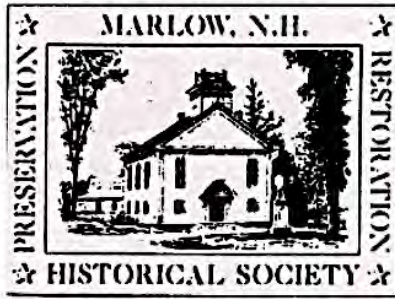
We made a beautiful float for the Old Home Days parade. It was a replica of the inn's dining room, with Emily and me seated at the table with wine glasses filled with tea, sipping away. Our parents didn't think a thing about it, but my aunt Lillian

Johnson (who then owned Pat and Jim Strickland's house) was very put out because she said everyone in town would think we were drinking wine. Of course that was just the point!

In my senior year in high school in Bellows Falls, Mrs. Wren came to the school for a special program. I remember how thrilled I was and how proud I was of her. It was fun to go backstage after the performance and give her a hug. I was rather shy and didn't have much credibility with my fellow students, and so no matter how often I mentioned knowing Mrs. Wren no one had ever paid me much attention....until then!"

The Society thanks Susan and Emily so much for sharing a bit of their youth in Marlow at The Christmas Trees Inn with our members and friends.





Marlow Historical Society
2015-2016

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DID YOU KNOW.....

that one of the most noted epidemics in Cheshire County history was the typhoid epidemic of 1856, which was especially severe in Marlow, Stoddard and Gilsum?

In an article entitled "Unwholesome Influence" by D. R. Proper, we learn that the chief chronicler of events associated with the epidemic was Dr. Marshall Perkins of Marlow. "The Marlow physician", it reads, 'found quinine, turpentine, brandy and beef tea his principle tools against the disease, and remarked afterwards that faced with another such epidemic he would resort to the same treatment."

We're Searching for Scaffolding

When we begin the next stage of work on Murray Hall, we will be re-covering the ceiling. Those are some mighty high ceilings!! This kind of job is not for the faint of heart, and requires considerable expertise. We have found an extremely generous contractor who is going to do this difficult work for us, and we will be supplying the materials, including the moveable scaffolding for him. Can you help us? Do you know of someone who would either lend us moveable scaffolding, or rent it to us at a reasonable rate? The work should commence in the late spring/early summer. Perhaps you would consider making a donation toward this large expense? A check earmarked with the words: "scaffolding" and sent to your society would be most appreciated. If you know of someone who can help, you could call any Board Member.



Scenes from Fall 2015

Joe Baril, Tony Davis, and Bob Sharp move the hearse to Murray Hall. On Painting Day, Peter Thayer gets the high spots!

We wish a Happy
 90th Birthday
 to a Great Friend
 of the Marlow
 Historical Society,
 Charlie Strickland!!