

# ~ Denmark Historical Society ~

## ~ Newsletter ~

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### LOOKING FOR ROOTS - IN DEED

Ever notice how the more things change the more things stay the same? That seemed to be the way it was with one of Denmark's old houses. When I was a little girl I remember driving by what I always called "Ot's" house. It had a prominent place on the corner of Route 117 and Sebago Road near enough to the road to have witnessed events and passersby up close. The windows were bare of curtains and the gray weathered exterior wore the weary expression of an old man who had seen it all.

In January 1994, Jason C. Stearns, Jr. purchased the building and land from the estate of Oscar A. Freeman. It is recorded as "a certain lot or parcel of land with buildings thereon situated in Denmark, Oxford County, Maine being the property conveyed by James H. Beck to Ida F. Beck by deed dated October 23, 1914" being bounded and described in said deed as follows:

"A certain lot or parcel of land with buildings thereon situated in said Denmark and at what is known as "Jordan's Corner", said buildings consisting of a store, house and stable, - and being the same parcel of real estate deeded me the said James. H.

Beck by the warranty deed of Warren H. Vinton, dated December 10, 1889, recorded in Oxford Western District Registry of Deeds Book 77, Page 205, said lot of land is bounded as of this date as follows: Northerly to Northwesterly by the road leading from Bridgton to Denmark Corner: Easterly by the road leading from the aforesaid road, Southerly, to "Perley's Mills" Railroad Station, Southerly and westerly by the land of Charles W. Blaisdell."

"Oscar A. Freeman acquired his title to the above premises in part as an heir at law of his late father, William H. Freeman, and in part as an heir at law of his mother, Annie J. Freeman, and in part by deed from Arlene F. Graham dated September 17, 1945 and recorded in said Registry at Book 142, Page 284, and in remainder by deed from Alice Freeman Hartford et al. dated July 11, 1946 and recorded in said registry at Book 152, Page 10."



We know that when the Becks owned the building that it had a wing facing Route 117. James Beck ran a general store and Ida Beck ran the East Denmark Post Office. What more can we find by following the old deeds back in time?

All transactions regarding Denmark property are recorded at the Oxford County Western District Registry of Deeds in Fryeburg. Armed with the name of the property owner, past or present, it is easy to find reference to a piece of property. The women at the registry are very helpful showing how to find the deeds and they will copy these for you at \$1.00 a page from the big record books.

Most deeds record the book and page of the previous transfer of the particular real estate and a description of the land and its boundaries. Sometimes the deed will refer you to a previous deed for a more detailed description. Once you have a book and page number you can start on your journey back in time. Using the Freeman - Beck property as an example let's see where it leads.

Following the deed references already mentioned to Book 77, page 205, Warren H. Vinton of Gray in consideration of \$300.00 paid by James H. Beck sold land with house, store and stable in Denmark. This was the same conveyed to Vinton by Charles E. Whidden in deed dated June 5, 1885 and recorded in Book 73, page 294. In this deed Whidden sold to Vinton for \$2,000.00 "a dwelling house, store and stable all connected with a lot of about one acre on which said buildings stand, situated in Denmark in the County of Oxford and bounded as follows viz: Northerly by the road leading from Denmark to Bridgton, Easterly, by the road leading from Denmark to Sebago, Southerly and Westerly by land of Wm. Blaisdell being the same premises conveyed to me by Nathaniel Hale by deed dated April 18, 1874 and by deed of Aaron H. Witham dated August 4, 1874 and recorded...Book 60, page 397.

If you notice, there is a considerable difference in selling price in these two deeds. Whidden and Witham ran a store on the said premises. Perhaps they sold all the store goods along with the property to Vinton and Vinton might have sold only the buildings and land.

Again, going back to Book 60 page 397, Aaron H. Witham sold to Charles Whidden for \$800.00 "a certain undivided half part of the parcel" conveyed to Witham and Whidden by Hale April

18, 1874; also a certain parcel of land being an undivided half part of the parcel conveyed to Witham and Whidden by Mial Jordan April 18, 1874.

In Book 60, page 288 Nathaniel Hale sold to Aaron Witham and Charles Whidden for \$360.00 "a certain parcel of real estate...being the same on which the store I now occupy stands, and the store thereon, and is the same Asa T. Hill conveyed to me."

In Book 58, page 540 Asa T. Hill sold for \$200.00 to Nathaniel Hale "a certain lot of land with the store and building thereon, situated in Denmark to wit at Jordan Corner so called and said lot and building being the same Mial Jordan deeded to Mark L. Jordan and the same Mark L. deeded to me recorded in Oxford Western Registry of Deeds to which reference may be had for a more particular description". This deed was recorded April 21, 1873.

Mial Jordan sold for \$30.00 to Mark L. Jordan just "a certain piece of land" as recorded in Book 57, page 75; "beginning at the corner of the county road leading from Denmark to Bridgton and the county road leading from Jordan's Corner so called to Sebago and opposite the dwelling house of Mial Jordan, thence southerly on the road leading to Sebago thirty-six feet, thence westerly at right angles with the first mentioned - eighteen feet, thence northerly at a right angle and parallel with the first mentioned line thirty six feet to the first mentioned county road thence easterly on said road eighteen feet to the first mentioned bound, with the right to pass over my land around the building that may be erected on said lot for the purpose of repairing the same."

From this we learn that the store was mostly likely built by Mark L. Jordan and as no previous deed was mentioned in this one dated May 8, 1867, it was necessary to go back to the book of names to look for land transactions involving Mial Jordan as buyer before 1867. I found what I was looking for in Book 57, page 96. It was a sale of land by Nathaniel Hale of Denmark, yeoman", for fifty dollars to Mial Jordan of Denmark. The description a certain parcel of land situated in said Denmark and bounded as follows viz: beginning at a pine stump standing on the westerly side on the road leading from the main county road to Isaac Berry's house, at the southeast corner of the old pasture and being the

corner of Lincoln Jewett's land, thence running south about 13 degrees east by the Stephen Berry farm to George Thomes land thence South 67 degrees west by said Thomes land 19 rods to a Beech tree, thence North about 20 degrees West by a spotted line to a stake and stones on said Jewett's line, thence northeasterly course by land I this day sold to Simeon Jewett about 18 rods to the pine stump first named - saving and reserving the hemlock timber suitable for logs which is cut and peeled on said lot to be taken off within eighteen months from date." This was dated September 13, 1853. If you check closely, you'll note that this deed of 1853 is recorded in Book 57, page 96 and the deed dated 1867 is in Book 57, page 75. How can the older deed be recorded on a later page? It seems that transactions were often made between people and the papers written but not recorded at the Registry for some time. There could be any number of reasons for this. The transfer might have been between family members or neighbors or friends. Perhaps there were more important things to do than ride all the way over to Fryeburg to record a transaction. Sometimes these deeds were recorded when the next sale was pending and the ownership needed to be proved. Whatever the reasons, the 1867 deed of Mial Jordan to Mark L. Jordan was not recorded until Feb. 7, 1870 and the 1853 deed of Nathaniel Head to Mial Jordan was recorded March 1, 1870.

At this point I ran into some difficulty because the nature of the description of the parcel of land was more transient and I had no maps from the time period to place the boundaries. I was left with only the names to follow and the knowledge of the property location. The afternoon was growing shorter and I was unable to find a satisfactory lead. There were many entries for the Head family but none of the descriptions for Nathaniel Head's transactions seemed to fit the Freeman - Beck store/Post Office property. It will take another visit to the Registry to follow the path further.

Owning a house that has a long past brings one to wonder about all the people who might have lived there. It was fairly easy to trace the transactions dealing with my own house and land. Sometimes there were boundaries marked by stone walls and initialed tree trunks and roads but the basic farm remained intact. There are many things that you can learn when you trace a path back in

time through the recorded deeds. I think that you will find it an interesting and rewarding journey.

## LORD ON LOGGING

At our March 14th meeting Percy Lord provided an entertaining evening filled with tall tales and logging lore as he spoke to a room filled to overflowing with interested folks about his experiences in the woods, mills and lumber camps of Denmark and other parts of Maine. Dressed in appropriate attire Percy had as a backdrop numerous tools of the trade for man and horse.

Early on his favorite chores seemed to be taking care of and working with the horses. Feeding and harnessing began long before breakfast. Work began before daylight and continued after dark. There were several mills in the Denmark area and more in surrounding towns. During the war years 1944 and 1945 there was little logging as many men had gone to war but also because there was little gas and few tires and the mills used gas motors. Horses were used for everything. Sometimes the boom logs were so long the truck could haul them but could not steer so they hitched the horses to the front of the truck. After the war the men came back to work. Percy drove a truck, worked with the horse teams and cooked in the camps as they logged around Granger Pond, the slopes of Pleasant Mountain, Pickett Hill and other Maine locations.

There were many French Canadians and Indians in the Maine logging crews. There were also lots of bed bugs and fleas in the old camps making it necessary to fumigate often as a new crop of fellows could bring a new crop of bugs. These were hard working men working in often hard conditions, "winters so cold the diesel fuel ran like cold molasses and the tea kettle froze on the stove", where the "only hard hat was your head."

As a cook, Percy was up at 3 AM to get the biscuits and beans ready for breakfast on the double oven cookstove. The men ate heartily of meat, potatoes and eggs and consumed numerous cookies, cakes and pies before ending their work day. On Friday nights things could get pretty rowdy when the bootlegger came to camp. Percy had more than one story to tell about fellows being tossed into their bunks, some even tied in for the night. When he wasn't cooking or driving a horse team, Percy hauled lumber by truck to Norway and Milford, NH

where it was loaded on freight cars going to Massachusetts.

When in the woods the men had to take good care of their saws and axes. Some prided themselves on how sharp they kept their tools and how few cuts it took to fell a tree or cut a length of wood. A man often kept a container of kerosene in his hip pocket to remove pitch from his blade. A crosscut saw was a "two man power saw" and the sawyers laid down a road through the trees felling them to line up for the skidders. It was important to keep the horses out of the choppers way. If you kept your focus, you kept your head and brought the logs out by team safely. Teamsters always carried an axe along with other tools and often wore a leather apron when rolling logs or shoeing horses. Cowhide was better than moosehide which made the apron too heavy.

A logging crew generally consisted of six to eight men, 4 crews of two men each to chop and saw, and 12 horses, 6 teams of two horses each to keep a mill going. There were various harnesses and shoes, and the teamsters had to be skilled at handling and shoeing the horses. Horses wore cleated shoes in the winter for better traction.

Logs that went down to the water were held together by a boom chain. In the water the wood was protected from the bugs and from staining. A "barking spud" was used to remove the bark. Percy had one made from an old car spring and said it usually proved that "the bark was best when the mosquitoes were thickest". Soaked logs could be very slippery and as men jumped the logs with their long peaveys for moving the logs footing could be treacherous. Tools were not as easy to replace as a man so when a man lost his footing it was often yelled "Save the cant dog, the hell with the man." Let him save himself if he could. Saving the tool came first.

It was a hard life but one with its own rewards; good food and plenty of it, good friends and good air, hard work, hard bodies. Logging in the woods today is a whole different industry with big skidders, chain saws, and computerized saw mills. It is an industry rich in history and tradition. Some loggers still use teams of horses to bring out the logs but they are few and far between. We thank Percy Lord for giving us an evening that filled our imaginations with the sights and sounds of the old camps. We could almost smell those biscuits.

As time and technology changed the industry Percy and his father sold the mill and got out of the business but he said it was a good life and he would do it all over again.

### CABIN FEVER KEPT IN CHECK

'Long about the end of March winter seems to be getting tiresome. We thought we would ease the tedium a bit by having a good old-fashioned game night. Saturday evening March 25th a band of hearty souls ventured out to the Arts Center with their board games under their arms to enjoy laughter, music, hot drinks and cookies while beating the pants off their opponents in friendly competition. Time flew by and before we knew it April was upon us. All those who joined in the fun thought we should do it again. Maybe we'll have a lemonade social when the long hot summer comes along.

### FIRST ANNUAL SHEEPFEST

The Society sponsored the First Annual Sheepfest at the Denmark Arts Center & Historical Society on Saturday, April 22nd from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The event was to raise funds for the Society by displaying many aspects of wool fibercraft, and to educate and entertain through demonstrations of spinning and shearing. Linda Whiting, aided by Lisa Pyburn, planned the activities while Winnie Moore, President of the Society, organized the refreshments.

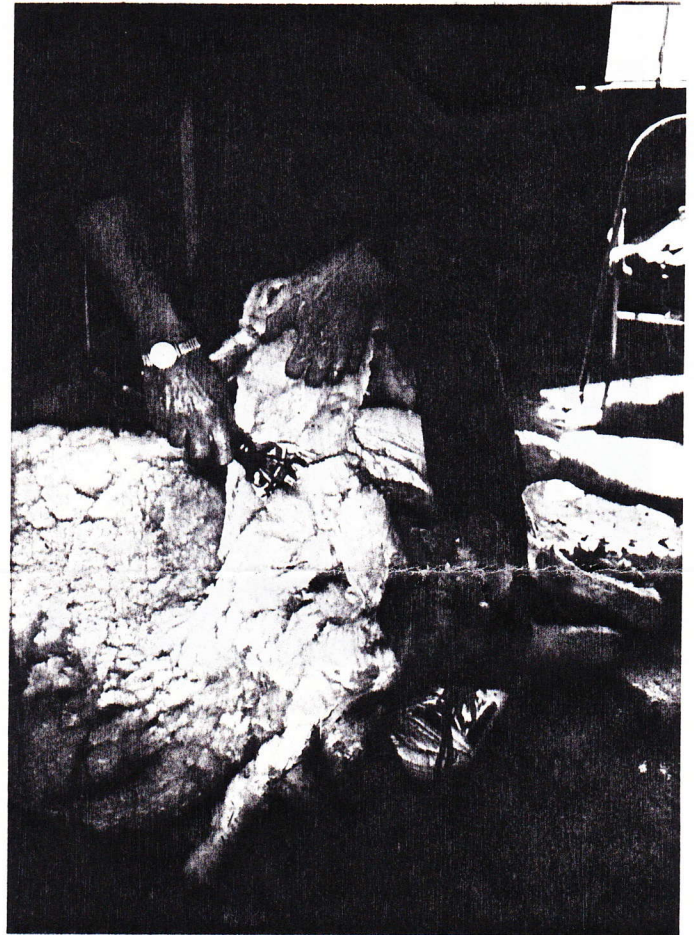
Early Saturday morning Henry Banks, Jon Marshall and Dan Eaton constructed three pens in the hall to hold the sheep for shearing, and they built a support frame for the shearer's machine. While Winnie was setting up and Linda and Lisa were organizing the spinners and other displays, Dan, Jon and Henry, using Helen Ramsdell's truck, collected the ram, the five ewes, and the five lambs from Netherfield Farm. The sheep put up quite a ruckus as the wranglers encouraged them into pens, as the lambs had been separated from their mothers. This commotion was not quelled until the men lifted and passed the lambs from one pen to another like a bucket brigade. Lisa Pyburn also brought two of her Finnsheep lambs from her farm in West Baldwin.

They were better behaved under the watchful eye of Jeremy Pyburn, age 5.

Lee Straw of North Edgecomb, who has been shearing for twenty six years sheared five sheep, demonstrating this skill and answering questions ranging from shearing and wool characteristics to sheep raising and apprenticeship. While he was shearing, his son swept away the waste wool pieces so that each sheep, balanced on its behind between the shearer's legs, would not slide away on the lanolin soaked floor. The children were especially enthralled as Lee removed up to twenty pounds of wool from the sheep leaving a silly looking animal surrounded by a pile of fleece.

The shearing machine buzzed and Lee worked and talked to his audience and to the sheep, and the spinners shared their knowledge and love of spinning with spinners and non-spinners. Kendra Whiting of North Yarmouth displayed felting techniques from prepared fleece to finished felted slippers. The old hall smelled of sheep and coffee and was filled with adults and children talking to the animals and browsing to inspect the yarns and patterns from Audrey Cameron's Ewe & I yarn shop, and the wool, yarn, knitted products, and sheep skins which the spinners had brought.

There were about one hundred and fifty people to view this first Sheepfest and the responses were very positive. More spinners have asked to attend next year including a spinner who would like to demonstrate spinning with a drop spindle. More people have asked that their sheep be sheared, and there will be demonstrations of hand shearing and carding as well as a fleece sale.



## JULY

The 2nd Annual Doll and Miniature Show will be held at the Denmark Arts Center on Saturday July 29th. If anyone is interested in showing dolls or miniatures or models please contact Sue MacDonald at 452-2196. This will be a show and sale. Some people will be selling while others will only be exhibiting.



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## AUGUST

Denmark Readers' Theater in conjunction with the Denmark Historical Society will be presenting two unique evening performances of "No Sweeter Thing", an adaptation from the Spoon River Anthology. Penny Morris is looking for more readers to join the group. Please contact her at 452-2606. Save Friday and Saturday August 18 and 19 for a special evening of adult theater.



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