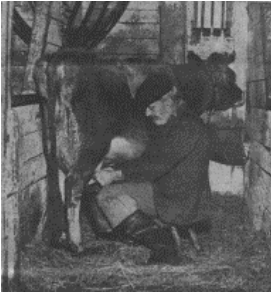


# Newfane Village in the Town of Newfane



Prisoner Frank Perkins, assigned to care for the Windham County Hotel Jail's three cows, extracts milk for the prisoners & tourists alike from a contented cow. Newfane's hotel - jail operated to the late 1930's, after which it was used to house the resident Sheriff's family.

The Village of Newfane, known at the time as Fane, was chartered the sixth township in the Southern Vermont tract in 1753 on Fane Hill (Newfane Hill) a couple of miles southwest of where it now stands. In 1772 the governor granted the name change to New Fane, and the first town meeting was held in May of 1774. Within a few years there were a twenty houses, a court house, an academy, three stores, two hotels, a meeting house, various repair shops, a jail and a whipping post.

After a certain amount of maneuvering, Newfane became the shire town (the county seat) in 1787, and in 1825 the hardy citizens moved their village down off the hill to the flats around Smith Brook, then known as Fayetteville, where there were only a few houses.

They took some of the buildings apart, brought them down on ox sleds and put them up again. (Among these were part of the present Newfane Inn and the two houses just south of the church. But mostly they had to build anew. In that first year a general store quickly appeared where the Newfane Store now stands, while the county erected a brand new courthouse and jail at a cost of \$10,000. A meetinghouse went up in 1832 (now the Union Hall) and a few years later the Congregational Church was built. During the next decade, houses went up one after another on Pleasant Street (now West Street) and on Main Street (Route 30) which included a hotel addition to the jail, called the Windham County Hotel, to house the

court personnel; so that the village we have now was mostly in place by 1850.

As the nineteenth century waned, the changes began. The telegraph was put through in 1878, soon followed by the 36-mile, narrow-gauge Brattleboro & Whitehall Railroad. Newfane now had a railroad station (still intact on Depot Street) when the first train came to town in 1880.

About the turn of the century, legend has it that the first bathroom came to town. It was successfully installed in the Tower House (sixth house north of the Four Columns Inn). However, as soon as the owner found he was in for a tax increase on his house because of the improvement, he pulled out the pipes and nailed the door shut.

In the early 1900's Benjamin Eager, living right across the street, put in the first telephone. "Central" was ensconced in the building at the corner of West and Court Streets. Central worked long hours and was supplied with a couch where she could curl up for a nap when things were slow. Often, however, the circuit was overloaded and Central would tell a person trying to make a call, "Busy now. We'll call you back." One time, when this happened to George Read, he was so exasperated he drove up to South Wardsboro and delivered the message in person. About an hour after he got back his phone rang and Central said, "We are ready for your call now." His response was never repeated for history to record.

John D. Pierce the clockmaker and undertaker had the first automobile, a Nash Rambler. His license plate number was VERMONT 188. The year was 1909. By the teens there were many more cars, but people had to put them up before freeze up because frozen ruts in the roads played havoc with the tires.

By 1912 there were two street lamps to illuminate the space in front of the present Country Store and the horse trough. Fired by gasoline, they were hauled up every night on ropes. Electricity arrived in 1913 and, like the rest of the country, Newfane entered a new era.

So, the old was giving way to the new. The automobile put the railroad out of business by 1936 and the dusty, grass-bordered carriage roads soon gave way to gravel and tar. Farms disappeared one by one, until the last sizable farming operation in Newfane gave up in the 1970's.

Those sturdy ancestors of Newfane and their lifestyle are gone forever, but what they built is still here for all of us to enjoy.

*Source "A Walk Through Historic Newfane Village" Copyright © 1985 by Robert L. Crowell*