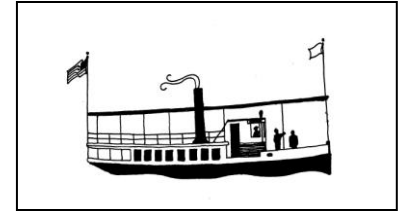


# Sunapee Echoes

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Winter 2016

## WHAT'S HAPPENING?

**The Old Abbott Library.** I had hoped to have some news for you regarding the original library building by now, but legal limbo persists. That does not mean that we are standing still, however. We are preparing a formal proposal to present to the Select Board when the time is right. It will ask that we be allowed to lease the building while raising funds to buy it. We are eager to get started but cannot begin a capital campaign until we have a formal agreement with the town.

**Winter weather—finally!** Here's a weather report for those of you who are out of town: as of mid-January, unseasonably warm temps gave way to colder air. We've had a bit of snow; the skiing is good and getting better by the day. Otter Pond froze over some time ago, but the big lake is just now icing up.

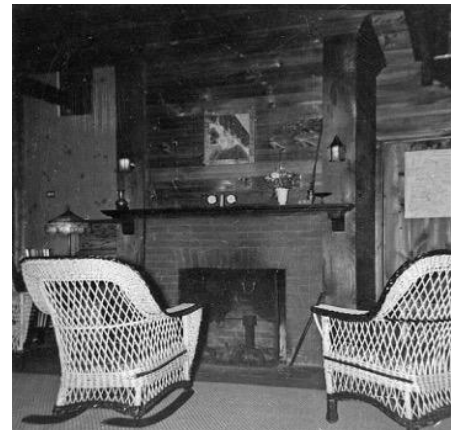
**New website.** Thanks to former summer resident Phil Chapline of Chapline Computers, Inc, we have a newly redesigned website. It's intended to be more informative and user friendly. The address remains the same ([SunapeeHistoricalSociety.org](http://SunapeeHistoricalSociety.org)). We hope you will check it out soon and let us know how you like it. Suggestions for further improvements are always welcome.

**Summer Programs.** Our plans for summer are taking shape. We've decided on the theme of *business and industry* for our programs—one general enough to provide something of interest for everyone. A list of tentative dates and topics is on the website, and I'll provide more detail in the next issue of this newsletter. Mark your calendars for a history cruise on 27 June.

**Collaboration with our friends.** In addition to our usual programs at the museum, we will team up with LSPA at

Knowlton House to provide an overview of Sunapee's history from its founding as Saville in 1768 to its bicentennial in 1968. And with our fellow historic organizations around the lake, we will publish another PALS (Partners Around Lake Sunapee) brochure. Watch for that in April.

**New exhibit.** We're planning a new exhibit in the space formerly occupied by the old time kitchen and the Bowdish skiff—an old cottage interior. We're gathering ideas and materials for it, so please let us know if you have either to lend. Thanks!



**Caring for our gardens.** Our thanks go to Pat and Gene Hall for their time and effort caring for the gardens at the museum over the past couple of years! They have asked to be allowed to retire this year. So if you'd like to help us by stepping into their shoes, please let us know.

*Stay warm!*  
Becky

## Enjoy fine dining and benefit the Sunapee Historical Society! Thursday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, at the New London Inn

This year we are participating in the New London Inn's *Thursday's Child* program. Simply dine in their Coach House restaurant on the appointed evening and know that a portion of the proceeds will come to the Sunapee Historical Society. So round up some friends, make a reservation, and enjoy the evening. Thank you!

## *Did you know...*

As Town Meeting season approaches, it's fun to look back one hundred years to see what the hot topics were then.

At the 1916 town meeting, the people were asked to consider 25 warrant articles including the catch-all "any other legal business."

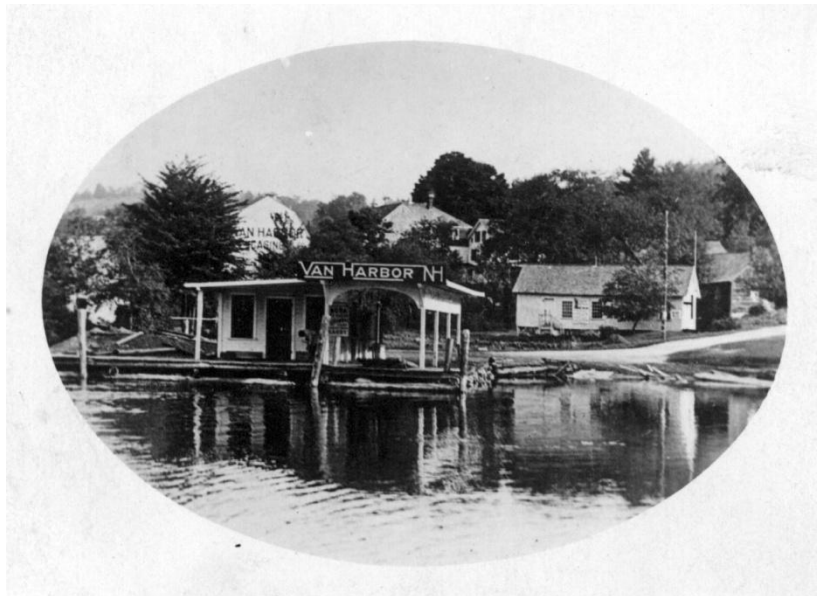
- The usual town officers were elected, except that road agents were included—three of them—for the central part of town, and north and south ends.
- Some 10 articles dealt with **funding** for the various departments, totaling a whopping \$12,015.
- The selectmen were instructed to provide **a public dumping ground**. (So where did all the trash go before that? Maybe we don't want to ask!)
- **Electric street lights** were still being added, this time on Lake Avenue with more under consideration for the village.
- The selectmen were instructed to improve the **road** from Post Office Square (the junction of Main, High, and Central streets) to the Harbor.
- **The Hame Shop** Committee reported on its year of deliberations on what to do with the property (spanning the Sugar River at High Street), commenting that any businesses that might consider moving to town would only do so with promises of financial aid and that Sunapee would have to do at least as well as the towns that were willing to offer inducements to attract new industries. Several warrant articles dealt with parts of the property: the Hame Shop Office (currently Lake Sunapee Insurance) was appropriated for the use of the town offices, and part of the plant was to be deeded to the Sunapee Shoe Company (or any other business) if it were able to conduct continuous business.
- And for the third—and final—time, the voters were asked whether **Georges Mills** should be renamed **Van Harbor**. This time the article was tabled.

Billy B. Van, vaudevillian and silent movie producer had come to town in 1902 for his health. He built a farm, then a casino (dance hall), later gave that one to the Catholic Church, and built another. Over the years, he did much for the community—promoting modern farming practices, marketing local products such as maple syrup and rag rugs, and sometimes providing groceries.

By 1913, the town was called—whether at his instigation or in thanks for all he had done—Van Harbor, but the post office name had not been changed. At town meetings in 1914 and 1915, an article requesting the official name change was passed over, much to his consternation. In a newspaper ad and letter to the editor of a local paper he attacked his opponents for their stupidity and claimed that the change was critical to the economic development of the town. By 1915, Van decided that Georges Mills could and should become a cinematic center and he had convinced the Equity Motion Picture Co. to relocate from New York City. That summer some 75 actors, actresses, cameramen, and technicians descended on the town and he produced a couple of silent films using local people, including 10-year-old Lee Collins, as extras. But that was too much for some and a third attempt to rename the town the following March failed. The vote on the motion to table the article was 114 in favor and 77 against—an indication that he had considerable support, though not enough.

Equity moved west and helped establish Hollywood. And by 1918, Van had moved to Newport where he established a business and is credited with the "Sunshine Town" appellation. He continued performing, as well, and died in Newport in 1950 at age 80.

Our thanks go to Suzanne Huber, granddaughter of Frank Holmes, the carpenter who did a lot of work for Van, for giving us, among other things, press clippings regarding the dust up over renaming Georges Mills.



## *The Woodsums' Ice Cutting Machine.*

This is ice cutting season. Or at least it was in yesteryear when summer refrigeration relied on large blocks of ice harvested in the winter, stored in sawdust in local ice houses, and delivered by the friendly ice man. Each January, Musterfield Farm in Sutton puts on an ice cutting demonstration at Kezar Lake. This year ice has been so late in forming that the demonstration has been postponed.

We have various ice cutting memorabilia at the museum—ice hooks and tongs, photos, and a painting by the late Ken Andler (see page 4). But we have recently discovered that Frank and Dan Woodsum (of steamboat fame) obtained a patent for an ice cutting machine in November 1893. Barbara Chalmers reports the following:

On Dec. 19, 1895 the *Argus* reported: "Woodsum Bros have their ice cutting machine underway. It is to be run by electricity and will of course be a success, as all their patents are." I couldn't find any reference to its continued use at Lake Sunapee for ice cutting operations. So it's not clear that it was in continued use or ever a commercial success. That may be the machine, however,



*Frank and Dan Woodsum*

to the right in this undated photo of ice cutting in the Harbor. And in 1896, the Montpelier, VT *Argus and Patriot*, said this: "Woodsum Brothers of Sunapee N.H., are cutting ice with an electric ice cutting machine. In a recent trial they cut 63 feet to the depth of 9 inches in 75 seconds with a circular saw run with great velocity by a motor. This saw is raised or lowered at the operator's will."

What were their other patents? Their first patent was granted in 1871 for an improved water wheel design. Their 3<sup>rd</sup>—and perhaps most important—patent was granted in April 1894 for their steam engine control system, allowing the pilot from the pilot house to control speed, forward and reverse. Prior to their invention, steam boats required an engineer in the engine house to do this upon direction from the pilot via a speaking tube, or for small boats, just shouting out instructions to the engineer. The down-side was that the pilot had to also hold an engineer's license, since regulator authority considered him to be performing both positions on a steamboat. Watch for a program this summer on the Woodsums and their steamboat company.

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*Ice Harvesting – painting by Ken Andler*