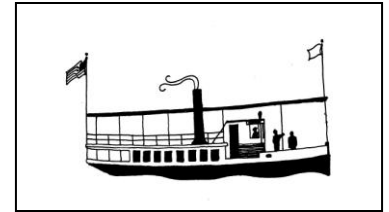


# Sunapee Echoes

Sunapee, New Hampshire Historical Society, Inc.  
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Fall 2016

## WHAT'S HAPPENING?

**At the Museum.** By the time you read this, the museum will be closed for the winter. This year, we're moving more of our precious items than usual into our tiny office space to keep them from mildewing in the controlled-by-the-climate barn that is our museum.

We've taken advantage of some lovely fall weather to paint one long side of the museum and work on the front. Here's our painting team hard at work:



*L to R: Lela, Tony, Becky, Sandy, Greg, & Ron*

**Sunapee Archives at the Old Abbott Library.** We continue to work toward acquiring the old Abbott Library to provide a better and year-round accessible space for our fragile artifacts. Our site plan review was

successful earlier this month and we're now working out details of a potential contract with the town. Remember: we need to **Preserve the Past to Enrich the Future!**

**Sunapee's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.** In 2018, we'll celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of Sunapee—our sestercentennial. The Town has formed a committee to plan appropriate events. If you have ideas, be sure to speak up. Our fall program this year will be devoted to reviewing photos, memorabilia, and memories of our bicentennial celebration in 1968 and inspiring ideas for our 250<sup>th</sup>. See below for details. We hope to see you there!

**Thanks to our volunteers!** We had a wonderful season with two history cruises, two benefit sales, well-attended programs, revamped exhibits, and our usual impressive schedule of open hours. I'm especially proud of our increased collaboration with other organizations: the Newport Historical Society, the Sunapee Heritage Alliance, LSPA, and the Fentons/MV Mt. Sunapee. Thanks go to all our volunteers—docents, researchers, actors, cottage builders, painters, and donors.

It's sad to see summer go, but our fall foliage has been spectacular, and soon we'll be skiing. Isn't it nice to live where there's always a change to look forward to?!

We'll look for you on the slopes and around town!

*Becky Fitts Rylander*

Announcing our Fall Program!

## ***Sunapee's Bicentennial Revisited***

Presented by Ron Garceau

This program will recall the celebration of our 200<sup>th</sup> in 1968 featuring a parade, ceremonies, commemorative coins, a Bicentennial Ball, and more.

Come share your memories and offer suggestions for 2018!

7pm at Sunapee's Community Methodist Church  
on Lower Main Street  
Free, open to all. Refreshments after.



*Bicentennial Parade heads down Central Street*

## ***Did you know...***

...that Georges Mills was once a mecca for actors at the dawn of the motion picture industry? Comedian and vaudevillian Billy B. Van came to town in 1897 for his health. Soon he was buying and selling property (at least 15 different properties between 1902 and 1921), setting up a dairy farm of no small repute, performing a variety of philanthropic deeds, and entertaining folks. In our Winter 2016 issue, we gave you a quick rundown on his life in Georges Mills. Now additional information has come to light, especially regarding his years in Newport, thanks to the efforts of the Newport Historical Society, Jayna Hooper, Paul Rheingold, and John Tariot.

Billy B. (Busy) Van was a larger-than-life character. When moving pictures came along, he began filming in Georges Mills, attracting actors, many of whom he worked with in New York City. Local folks were given bit parts and he was a mentor to Georges Mills's own Lee Collins, later a dancer and choreographer in New York. Eventually, the coterie of flamboyant actors was a bit much for the townspeople. Once his actors followed the siren call of Southern California and his Equity Motion Picture Company moved to Hollywood, Billy's days as a movie producer were over. He chose to remain in New Hampshire, moving to Newport where he and his second wife raised 3 children, he produced Pine Tree Products (soap that "will keep everything clean except your conscience!" and other toiletries), traveled the country as a vaudevillian and motivational speaker, did radio broadcasts, coined the "Sunshine Town" appellation for Newport, wrote *Snap Out of It* (a book) during the depression, and more. If you're hooked and want to know more, we recommend *Billy B. Van: Newport's Sunshine Peddler*, a book written this year by Jayna Hooper and available at the Newport Historical Society.

But what of those silent films? We have a copy of one, *The Plucky Hoodoo*. John Tariot, a silent film expert and archivist, is doing his best to locate more. We'd love to find *Zooloo Nightmare*. Perhaps that's the one that was too much for the good citizens of Georges Mills?!

Billy continued to star on Broadway through the 1920s, acting in many plays as comic characters that he created himself. We have often seen photos of him dressed as one of those characters and, thanks to a gift from Rodney and Tracey Gonyea, we now have his portrait painted on cloth—an item that may have been mass-produced as a memento. Jayna Hooper's book tells us that this character was known as Patsy Bolivar -- a naïve character who was often the victim of nefarious types. As Patsy, he may have helped coin the term "patsy."

In August, the Newport Historical Society celebrated Billy B. Van's life and contributions to Georges Mills and Newport in grand style with a program titled *Billy B. Van, the Sunshine Man*. We were glad to collaborate on the evening with our sister historical society. The program told the story dramatically with Jayna as narrator and Dean Stetson as Billy. Together they brought Billy to life and demonstrated especially his cleverness, business acumen, generosity, and eternal optimism. If the program is repeated, you won't want to miss it.

As Billy would say,

***We wish you the Sunshine of Life!***



***To our wonderful volunteers:*** huge thanks to all of you for all you do to help us preserve Sunapee's history and educate anyone who will listen. Here are some of you, with apologies to anyone we missed!

*History cruise research and narration:* Barbara Chalmers, Midge Eliassen, Nancy Dutton.

*Actors:* Greg Young and Greg Weiss

*Cottage builders:* Greg Young, Ron Garceau, Barbara Chalmers, Dick Gassett, Lela Emery, Ron Hand, Tony Bergeron

*Cottage materials and furnishings:* W W Trow & Son, Durgin and Crowell, Prospect Hill Antiques

*Exhibits:* Barbara Chalmers and Lois Gould

*Painting:* Greg Young, Sandy Alexander, Ron Hand, Becky Rylander, Lela Emery, Tony Bergeron

And, of course, our *docents*: We'll list them all in our next issue, but suffice it to say that we couldn't open the museum as much as we do (over 250 hours this season) without the help of many. We know that it's difficult to commit to a schedule in the midst of a busy summer, and we appreciate all you do!

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### ***Another Coming Event:***

A program on the life of Governor Francis P. Murphy at the Richards Free Library in Newport on Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup> at 7pm -- the first in a series of talks by Kenneth Vigue on Murphy's early years and time spent in Newport related to the Winter Carnival, the McElwain shoe manufacturing business, and more.

For more information, see this event page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1721522124777065/>

And this video promotion of the event on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WS0ETzMXeCA>

This is a rags-to-riches story that promises to be fascinating!

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Here's a membership and donations form for any of you who missed the opportunity earlier in the year.

### **2016 MEMBERSHIP – RENEWALS – CONTRIBUTIONS**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAILING ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOWN, STATE, ZIP:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-MAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **CHECK MEMBERSHIP TYPE:**

\$15 Individual     \$25 Family     \$50 Business     \$100 Patron     \$300 Sustainer

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS:**

Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_     I wish to remain anonymous

#### **NEWSLETTER**

Send future newsletters by e-mail

Send future newsletters by postal mail

#### **Please make checks payable to:**

Sunapee NH Historical Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 501, Sunapee, NH 03782

Thank you!

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**Sunapee NH Historical Society, Inc.**  
**PO Box 501**  
**Sunapee, NH 03782**

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Barbara Chalmers, *Vice President*  
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Lois Gould, *Secretary*

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Lucy Young

*Nominations:*

Ron Garceau

*Emeritus:*

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Jo Hill  
Lois Gallup



***At the Sunapee Bicentennial Ball - 1968***  
***Front Row, L to R: Eileen Stiles & Bill Fitts, Priscilla & Babe Sargent,***  
***Dot & Russell Jones, Alice Roach.***