

Dublin Historical Society

DUBLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03444 • FOUNDED 1920

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70 YEARS AGO: A DEVASTATING FIRE IN THE VILLAGE

Over twenty buildings were situated near the Town Oval the morning of Tuesday April 26, 1948. After nightfall that day all of these structures would be threatened by the flames and windblown embers of a major fire. Three buildings burned to the ground and a fourth was a total loss.

On the south side of Main Street stood the Dublin Public Library, Dublin Town Hall, the Lehmann house with the former Gowing livery barn behind it, and five buildings which Millard aka Spook and Dorothy Worcester had purchased only two years before— the I.G.A. store, the Gleason house and ell, two small barns, and the old livery barn, the new location for Worcester's Garage.

Across the street stood The Emerald luncheonette and filling station, the Dexter Mason house and barn which would soon become the home of Yankee Publishing, Glen Scribner's Clover Farm Stores (currently the Dublin Community Center), and behind them to the north the Allison/Shook family house and barn. Located further east on Main Street, The Dublin Community Church with its horse stalls on three sides, the former Chamberlain Tavern with its three barns and the Fiske house with a large barn lined the road.

This townscape is based on a 1904 photograph by Henry Allison. All the buildings listed above appear here except the Emerald which was built across from the library in 1930s. The three barns which burned appear on the far right of the image. The Gleason Store and the Dublin Town Hall block the view of the Gleason house and main livery stable on the south side of Main Street.



Dublin Historical Society

CONFLAGRATION

On the evening of Tuesday April 26, 1948 Dorothy Worcester walked her young son Michael home across Church Street after visiting his father's repair shop, and nothing seemed amiss. However, in less than an hour Christine Shook saw flames leaping out of one of the barns behind Worcester's Garage as she and her husband Harold were closing The Emerald luncheonette; Harold ran across the street to the town hall to raise the alarm.

Luckily, the fire equipment was located in the lower level of the town hall, so the response of fire fighters was prompt. Unfortunately, the small diameter of the hoses and the power of the fire engines' pumps to

bring water 2000 feet uphill from two ponds was insufficient to bring the fire under control. Conditions prompted Fire Chief Glen H. Scribner to call other towns for assistance. Gusty winds further complicated containing the fire, with airborne sparks carrying over a quarter mile radius. It was reported that many residents were on their roofs with fire extinguishers and that the wood shingle roofs of the church's horse sheds ignited no less than 25 times. It took the arrival of the larger fire equipment from Keene helped quell the inferno.



Dublin Historical Society

This undated, early 20th century photo shows the Gleason house and the old livery stable which would burn in the fire. The store building shown on the right escaped the flames. Note the telephone office sign.

The fire started in a small barn in which the Boy Scouts were storing three tons of newspaper they had collected. The flames quickly spread to the adjacent larger barn in which Doris Foote ran The Dublin Shop, a gift shop and dress goods store. Unabated, the fire then consumed an ell of Worcester's Garage rented by carpenter Wendell Blomgren and the garage itself. Flames then spread to the Gleason house which the Worcester's had recently updated and turned into two rental units. Christine Shook wrote, "The whole village seemed doomed - only help from Keene, Marlboro [sic], Jaffrey, Peterboro [sic], Harrisville and Hancock saved the town."

Louisa Lehmann Birch was eight years old at the time and remembers Dublin School boys emptying the contents of her family's house, which stood just to the east of the old Gleason house. She tells of evacuating with her mother, siblings and pets including her horse, Bobby, down the village hill to Ruth and Norm Wight's home, now the Stockwells. There were few trees between those houses at the

time, and she vividly remembers seeing a sudden ball of fire and witnessing her mother's fear that their house had burned. It did not burn in large part because Norm Wight sprayed the side of the house with a garden hose during the whole fire.

Christine Shook later wrote to her father Henry Allison, "I was never so scared in my life, and I still can't sleep at night! At one time the Emerald seemed doomed to go, and I moved out everything I could handle. Then the wind shifted and our house and barn seemed sure to go. The barn caught on fire once, but with quick help, they got it out."

Women from Monadnock Grange #103 and the Dublin Community Church set up a canteen to serve coffee and baked goods throughout the night (most of the food was supplied by the two local stores). Traffic continued to travel on Main Street, with curious onlookers sometimes running over the fire hoses, until the state police arrived and created a detour. The telephone operators stayed at the switchboard upstairs in the I.G.A. store until the wires burned, and they lost power.



Dublin Historical Society

Christine Shook wrote on a postcard showing the damage, "This shows what remains of Spook's garage and the Geo Gleason house. Note how the back of the I.G.A. Store is scorched. It's a miracle that the store didn't go - if it had gotten afire, everything else in the center would have gone, too!" The proximity of the store and town hall to the site of the fire is astonishing.

AFTERMATH

Immediately a Fire Relief Fund committee was created to collect money to assist those who lost

property in the fire. The Worcester's lost four of their five buildings and the contents of the garage. Three cars, a trailer, and four boats stored in the garage building were destroyed. Blomgren lost all of his tools and had no insurance. Foote's losses were estimated to be \$1500. In all the estimated loss totaled \$50,000.

The Worcester's tenants, the Kenneth Grant and Harold Coates families, now homeless, were offered housing locally on the Amory estate. Fortunately, much of their furniture had been removed before the blaze reached the house.



Dublin Historical Society

An April 27th photo taken from the back of Worcester's Garage showing the charred remains of the Gleason house and the trailer destroyed by the fire. The Lehmann house is on the right.

The Worcester's themselves seemed undaunted. Within a week Spook told reporters "that he intends to have a barn moved from his home [on Church Street], which is several hundred yards from the scene of the disastrous fire, and that the building will serve as a temporary housing for the garage business." That barn is still in place behind the police station. In an interview 40 years later Dorothy related, "But somehow everybody said 'When are you going back?' We had very elaborate architectural drawings for a new garage. We couldn't touch it. We could hardly pay the architects. And so we had to give up and build this simple, old concrete block building."

THE TOWN TAKES STOCK

The town took up the question of upgrading their fire equipment at the next town meeting on March 30, 1949. The warrant article called for authorization "to purchase a new 500 gallon pumper for the Fire Department and install a 500 or 600 gallon water tank on one of the present pieces of apparatus...to borrow on notes or bonds of the Town a sum not to exceed twelve thousand dollars." Yes votes totaled 81 and No votes 28, so the article passed by the two thirds majority necessary to fund the purchases. Ironically, just over a year later both trucks helped extinguish a fire caused by an oil heater explosion at the Emerald, which threatened many of the same buildings at peril in the 1948 fire. The pumpers provided water to fight the fire, while hose was laid to a nearby pond. As a result the flames were extinguished before they could spread to Yankee Publishing, whose staff had transferred their mailing list data onto the village oval, just in case.

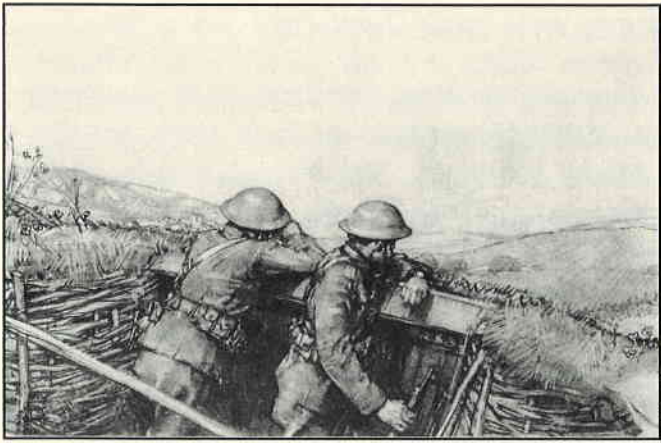


Dublin Historical Society

Circa 1955 aerial view of the village showing the site of the fire and the new Worcester's garage. Note the small white barn behind the store which served as a temporary garage immediately after the fire.

LAST CALL FOR 2018 MEMBERSHIP DUES

A dues envelope is enclosed for your convenience.



Lest We Forget: Dublin's Patriots in WWI

EXHIBIT IN DUBLIN TOWN HALL

AUGUST 11- 26

The centennial of the conclusion of the Great War has provided the impetus for DHS to create a temporary exhibition exploring Dublin's role in that conflict. It will include information on the men and women with a Dublin connection who participated in WWI before and during the United States' involvement. Featured will be accounts of efforts of those who served in the military and as medical personnel, as well as evidence of their fellow residents' efforts on the home front.

To be installed on the top floor of Dublin Town Hall the exhibit will showcase those who served and include details from the first-hand accounts of Richard Meryman and Charlie Thomas as well as photos donated by Gene Gowing, a photographer in the Signal Corps serving in France. To provide context vintage newspapers, several surviving maps used for intelligence purposes and two uniforms will be displayed.

Contributions on the home front will highlight Abbott and Gerald Thayer's theories of concealing coloration which led to the concept of what is now called camouflage and Dublin's participation in the Liberty Loan drives.

We extend our gratitude to Celeste Snitko, volunteer and board member, for so ably serving as guest curator, who spent well over a year researching and organizing this exhibit.

HOURS OF THE EXHIBIT

AUGUST 11- 26

DAILY FROM 10AM TO 1PM

MONDAY EVENINGS THE 13TH AND 20TH
FROM 4PM TO 7PM.

ALL ARE WELCOME AT THE OPENING RECEPTION AT
5:30PM ON MONDAY AUGUST 13TH.

Annual Meeting

SUNDAY AUGUST 19 AT 4:00 P.M.

Inez McDermott, will present: *"Over Here: American Artists and WWI"*

All are invited to the Dublin Historical Society's 2018 annual meeting on Sunday August 19th at 4 PM in the Fountain Arts Building at the Dublin School.

After a brief business meeting Inez McDermott, Professor of Art History at New England College, will present, *Over Here: American Artists and WWI*, a program about how American artists working during the early 20th century treated the subject matter of war. With the patriotic scenes by Childe Hassam or the grim portrayal of wounded soldiers in John Singer Sargent's "Gassed" artists created a wide spectrum of images. McDermott will outline the significant output of artists working between 1914 and 1918, as they attempted to interpret the complexity of war for their viewers.

Please park at the top of William North Road and walk across the quad. The Fountain Arts Building will be uphill on your right. For those who wish level access please turn onto Lehmann Way from Old Common Road and park in front of the FAB or on Lehmann Way.

IN MEMORIAM

The society reports with great sorrow the recent loss of

Rosemary Puddington James

Jane Stewart Young

Cles Staples

We extend our condolences to their families