

Windham Historical Society Quarterly Review

Summer 2026

OLD TOWN HOUSE CRIER

By Carol Manchester

SPECIAL EDITION: SOCIETY LAUNCHES MAJOR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN!

If you've seen the big thermometer sign in front of the 1833 Old Town House recently, you might be wondering what it's all about. Let us explain.

The thermometer is announcing the official launch of the SAVE THE 1833 OLD TOWN HOUSE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN!

This is by far the most aggressive fundraising venture in the almost 60-year history of our Society.

As far back as 1735, Windham's Founding Fathers recognized the need to hold regular meetings and agreed to do so annually on the first Thursday of the month of March. A town clerk and town officers would be elected at this meeting, business would be transacted, and other matters of importance to the community would be discussed and voted upon.

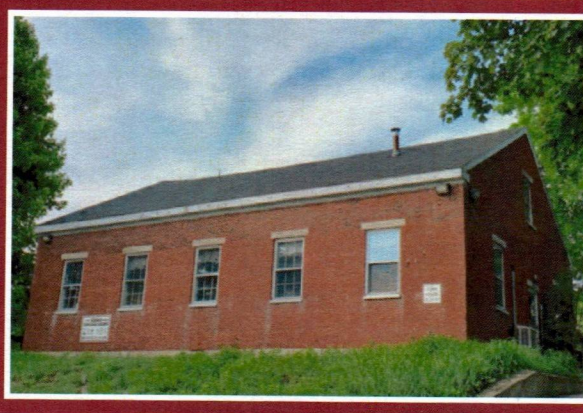
As the Town headed into the next century, it experienced growing pains and change, and it became clear that Windham required a centrally located building that could accommodate the Town's ever-growing population and where official business could be conducted.

In 1833, a Town House was commissioned to be constructed on a plot of land the Town purchased for \$15, and the story of our Old Town House began.

The building served as our Town Hall for many years and over time went through many transformations. In 1864, it doubled as a schoolhouse with Mr. Joseph W. Knight at its helm. In 1893, the State passed a law



The Town House served as our Society Headquarters for over 40 years.



This year's focus is to save the historic 1833 Old Town House.

that Windham should have a high school, and the Old Town House served that purpose until 1910 when the new high school building was completed.

By 1980, the Town had clearly outgrown the small brick structure and the Town Offices were moved to the remodeled former high school at 8 School Road. In 1984, the Windham Town Council voted to sell the building to the Windham Historical Society for a nominal sum, and it became the Society's new headquarters building. It served that purpose for over 40 years.

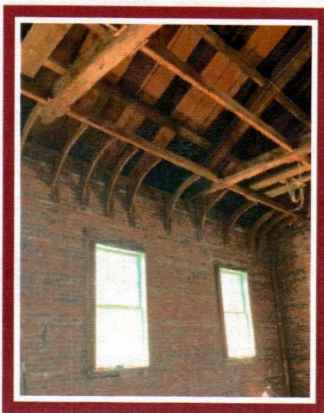
In June of 2025, what began as concerns for a floor with inadequate structural support to hold the historic old safe and a crawl space in need of extensive remediation had become a major reconstruction project. The Windham Historical Society hired renovation company Forge and Quill to help determine the best way to tackle the floor situation. After careful consideration, it was determined that Forge and Quill should peel back the multiple layers of prior renovations to reveal the original structure and construction integrity of the building.

Now renovations have begun and the building has been brought back to its very core. It's easy to observe the wooden supports that are above the 13-foot double brick wall. They look much like the ribs of an inverted canoe. This interesting architectural feature was designed to control the building's acoustics. Overhead, you can view cross beams, the ridge pole, and planking for an upstairs classroom. Near the entrance, one sees an original framing post with markings.



The building doubled as the Town Hall and a school in the 19th and 20th centuries.

EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!



The wooden supports resembling an inverted canoe are readily visible.

Today, when you step inside that 40' by 50' space, it makes it easy to envision meetings where the town clerk presided on a slightly raised platform to conduct the Town's business. You can imagine lines of Windham citizens voting for their favorite candidates at elections. You can visualize people purchasing licenses and permits, paying fines being levied, and even witnessing a marriage ceremony from time to time. If the building's original safe could talk, what stories it could tell!

Now it is time to take action.

At this point, we need your help to complete these renovations and bring the building into the 21st century, adhering to new code requirements and meeting current code approval. We need new bathroom and kitchen facilities, improved lighting and plumbing, and a handicap-accessible entrance. We'd like this building to be a vibrant center for history, providing ongoing and timely historic displays, serving as a reference library for people exploring their pasts, and providing a public meeting facility accessible to the entire community. It would be home to genealogy records, deeds, original town documents, Civil War letters, photos of Windham, artifacts, books, and more.

We need your help to continue!

The need is great and immediate. There are urgent necessities that need to be addressed. In the current phase of reconstruction, we are hoping to work on the plumbing and electrical infrastructure, install an ADA-compliant handicap bathroom, address ingress and egress accessibility, and add a staircase to access artifacts stored above the main floor. It is a lofty goal, and we are relying on our membership to help.

Donations can be made through our website or by sending a check to:

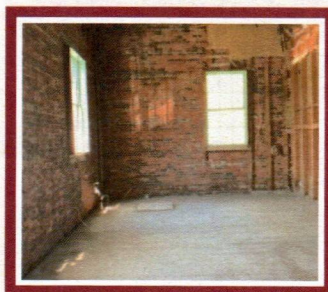
PO Box 1475
Windham, ME 04062

WHS is a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; all donations are tax deductible. A contribution of \$5,000 or more will receive permanent recognition on a plaque in the completed 1833 Windham Town House.

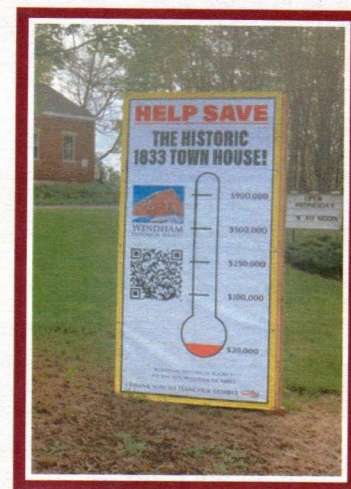
Can you give a little yourself and spread the word about the project to your families and friends? Maybe post about it on Facebook or Instagram? Anything you can do will be appreciated.

In the meantime, the progress we make will be documented on that large thermometer outside the beloved old building. Let's work together to get that red line to the top.

The 1833 Old Town Hall has served the Town of Windham well. It is time for payback. What you give now will come back a hundredfold as this cherished landmark continues to serve Windham for 200 more years and well beyond for future generations to enjoy.



The building has been brought back to its basic core with recent renovations.



Your donation will make that red line rise!

WINDHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT

The goal of the Windham Historical Society is to foster interest in the history of the town by presenting relevant programs, providing educational opportunities, and maintaining historical facilities where displays of the town's past are available.

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Kids on the Green – It's That Time Again!

The Windham Historical Society greeted eight classes of third grade students from Windham Primary School in the month of May. For four days, docents Walter Lunt, Paula Sparks, Becky Delaware, Haley Pal, Susan Simonson, Linda Lunt, Barbara Graves, Kyle Allen, Connie Hodgdon, and Lynne Jones guided over 150 young historians as they visited the museums of the Village Green.

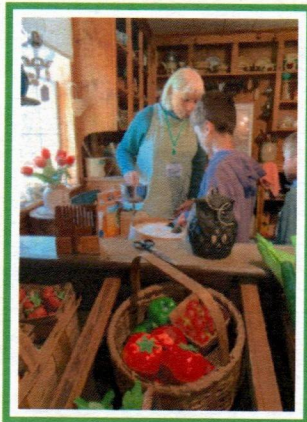
Certain changes were made to the tours this year according to Education Liaison Walter Lunt. "They've been designed to improve the students' experiences with local history," he says. "More hands-on activities are planned and the Village Green's blacksmith shop will open to include demonstrations performed by resident smithy Sam Simonson." Also, additional time has been allotted to the "scholars" in the one-room schoolhouse.

Primary school teacher Marc Miller has been preparing all the students for their trip back in time. "I love doing this," he says. Miller invests several hours teaching Windham history before the students come to the Village Green. He covers early Native history, the Town's founding families, churches, schools, the covered bridge, and the Gambo Gunpowder Mills.

By Walter Lunt & Haley Pal



The WPS Third Graders loved the "Thank You" banner created for them by the Society. They have raised close to \$10,000 over the past several years. This year's donation was \$793.82!



Docent Barbara Graves giving a lesson on the use of a scale in measuring commodities such as sugar, flour, and rice in the Old Grocery.

Lunt observed that these pre-tour lessons make the Village Green visits more meaningful. "The students' questions and comments sometimes sound almost adult-level when they've been prepared," he says.

This year, students enjoyed hands-on opportunities with a variety of activities that were common in days gone by. They hung clothes on a clothesline, cleaned a rug with a rug beater, darned a sock, used a scale to weigh sundries, and even emptied a commode in the Old Grocery.

In the Windham Center Library, not only did they learn about the building's history, but also about life in 1776 America. The addition of the Village blacksmith was a real crowd-pleaser, and the extended Village School tours were the hands-down student favorite. Every student questioned about their trip said being a pupil in the schoolhouse was the highlight of the day.

"I thought the field trip would be good, but this is better than I ever expected," one student commented. Another exclaimed, "I never knew you could have so much fun with history!" Since "Have fun with history" is our slogan, I'd say the new curriculum has proved to be a whopping success!

We Need Your Help!

By Susan Simonson



We have some wonderful events planned for the 2026 season. They are fun and also necessary in order to promote our Village Green and bring awareness to the Old Town House renovation project. The more exposure we get to the public, the better our message will spread and the closer we'll come to meeting our long-term goals.

This fall, we have two events where volunteers from our membership would be very helpful.

The Lakes Region History Tour September 12, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

We are hoping to have a **Happy 250th Birthday, America!** party during this year's tour. We're asking for volunteers to:

- Make birthday cakes we can serve on the Gazebo during the course of the day
- Act as cake servers on the Village Green Gazebo
- Be a docent for a building on the Green
- Set up and take down before and after the event
- Assist our blacksmith, Sam Simonson, as he sets up shop prior to the event
- Be a photographer in the photo booth
- Man our fundraising booth

Fall Harvest Festival

October 10, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

The Harvest Festival is the Society's biggest fundraising event of the year. When it comes to volunteers for this day, the more the merrier is the rule. We can use help with:

- Setting up and taking down the day before and day of the event
- Serving as docents in the historic buildings
- Manning the Society's fundraising booth
- Taking pictures of people in Colonial costumes at our photo booth
- Working and cooking at the food booths
- Helping with vendor organization before the fair begins
- Serving as runners to fill in where needed throughout the day
- Gardening, cleanup, and decorating of the Gazebo area before the event.

(cont on page 4)

Friend Sponsorships for the Fall Harvest Festival

A \$100 donation towards the event is helpful in covering promotion, advertising, signage, food, and miscellaneous sundries necessary for a successful festival. All donors will be recognized on a poster at the fair.

Of course, donations of any size are always appreciated.

If you would like to volunteer for either of these events, please contact haleypal@aol.com or ssimons1@maine.rr.com.



Junior History Club Happenings

By Paula Sparks

Have you ever looked at a political cartoon and wondered what the cartoonist was trying to say? The Junior Historians have spent some time looking at Cold War-era and current political cartoons. Determining the time and history of when the drawings were done and then discussing them helped us understand the message the artist was trying to send.

One thing we realized was that many of the issues happening during the Cold War parallel those going on today. We invited local cartoonist Dale Leroux to come to a meeting and talk about how a cartoon is created and drawn. He shared some of his cartoons from the former local newspaper, the *American Journal*, and a comic book he authored and illustrated.

You may recall that gum-chewing was common in the Boomer years, and the gum wrappers made great material for the paper chains that were popular with teenagers in the 1960s. Since gum wrappers are harder to come by these days, the kids used modern-day decorative paper to create chains of their own. It took an entire meeting to make chains only five or six inches long — just long enough to turn them into bookmarks when colorful floss was added to one end!

In March, we celebrated St. Patrick's Day with a hunt for shamrocks, asking trivia questions about the Cold War or the holiday itself. At the end of the game came the reward — pots of gold filled with candy!

Inspired by stories about Cold War spies, teams of young historians raced to solve five different encoded messages written in assorted codes used by Cold War spies. Each message included a piece of the final code that would open a lock on a bag of treats. It was a very tight race. Everyone finished within seconds of one another.

The 1950s and 1960s were full of UFO sightings and stories of crashed spaceships. There was talk of alien abductions, suspicious activities at Roswell and Area 51, and secret government reports of visitors from other planets. We used YouTube videos to find explanations and chose a few to discuss. After a game of UFO frisbee, space trivia provided a lively review of what we had learned. Everyone earned Monopoly money for our annual end-of-year gift card giveaway.

Learning about the 1960s wouldn't be complete without tie-dye and silk screening, so the last few meetings were spent learning about the history of both. During one session, the Junior Historians made their own tie-dye T-shirts or a piece of artwork inspired by Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup cans. Local screen printer Cody Watts brought his equipment to a meeting, and we learned about the screen-printing process. With his help, each member made their own canvas print or T-shirt to take home.

The school year is coming to an end, and the History Club Baby Boomer adventures will end soon as well — but not without hands-on history adventures before we say goodbye until the fall.



The Club members enjoyed learning screen-printing from guest speaker Cody Watts.



Windham Then & Now:

Life was Hard in Colonial America

By Haley Pal

Windham's earliest colonists were a rugged bunch. They came on foot and by boat through a vast new wilderness where they would build their homes and raise their families. There were no excavators or lumber yards in the 1760s, so these hardy souls relied solely upon themselves and their families to erect a house, clear and plow fields for planting, and keep food on the table.

Many, like our first settler Thomas Chute, built their homes along the banks of the Presumpscot River, which was the only highway in the area at the time. He and his wife Mary lived in a single-story log cabin with a dirt floor. Rooms were separated by quilts hanging from the ceiling beams. Heat for the cabin came from one large fireplace.

The men in the colony often had trades they had learned before moving into the frontier. Chute, for example, was a tailor and William Mayberry was an adept blacksmith. But in the new territory of New Marblehead, they were also expected to be farmers, hunters, carpenters, and soldiers in order to survive.

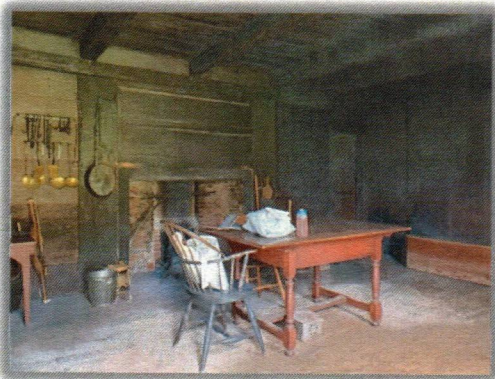
Each family would have grown necessary crops such as barley, rye, oats, peas, and beans. Protein for the family's daily meals would have to be tracked down, so men would need to know how to fish and hunt game. In the winter, men would occupy their time making furniture for their homesteads. A nice table and chairs and warm beds were welcome in any household.

The gentlemen also had to handle the family finances and know how to use a musket, a pistol, and a knife in case of an uprising by the Indigenous people who were fighting for their very way of life in these changing times.

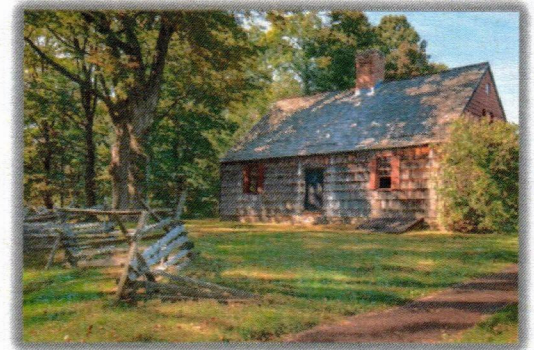
The women of the household were just as busy with their domestic chores. These included spinning wool into yarn for clothing and acting as schoolmarm to the children when no teacher was available. Eggs and milk would need to be gathered daily from dairy cows and chickens. In the autumn, women also smoked and cured meat, made soap, and preserved fruit and vegetables to feed the family in the winter months.

In addition, the women would keep the house neat and clean, cook all the meals, and wash all the clothing. They would keep bowls of water filled for washing hands and faces and, in the winter, would have to break through ice to haul water to the house for bathing and cooking.

Until the children were old enough to do the job, they also emptied the chamber pots stored under beds. They made candles from beef tallow to keep the house lit at nighttime. They literally worked from day to night to keep the house in order.



This simple interior with sparse furnishings is similar to what early homesteads in Windham would have looked like.



The Wick House in Morristown, New Jersey's Jockey Hollow historic site is an excellent example of Colonial architecture.

It was a solitary life much of the time, but once in a while a special event would occur. Happy occasions like births and weddings were a welcome reason for celebration. Local residents would have been invited to the Old Tavern in the center of town or possibly the Province Fort, where they would have been offered festive fare and spirits.

Guests would socialize, discuss politics and religion, and possibly dance to the music of a talented fiddler — much to the dismay of the more pious members of the community.

It was a hard life, but one they had chosen. They were making their way in a New World, and that world was their oyster. These spirited pioneers are the reason we are all here today, and it is why their memories still shine brightly in our town's history.

WINDHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S 2026 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Society will be celebrating the Nation's 250th birthday throughout the year. We hope you will join us for some of the fun activities we have planned.



JUNE

SUMMERFEST



This year's Summerfest theme is "Celebrating Sun, Stars & Stripes," and the Windham Historical Society is hoping to join in on the patriotic spirit. Our booth will feature Colonial-period artifacts and trivia, along with a roster of Windham men who served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

We'll also have some Colonial-style clothing on hand for guests to wear for a commemorative photo. The cost to dress up and have your photo taken will be \$1, with proceeds going toward the 1833 Old Town House renovations. We'll have the booth decorated in red, white, and blue, and we'll be waiting for *YOU* to pay us a visit!

Date: Saturday, June 20 **Time:** Noon - 5pm

Place: Windham High School Grounds, 406 Gray Road, Windham

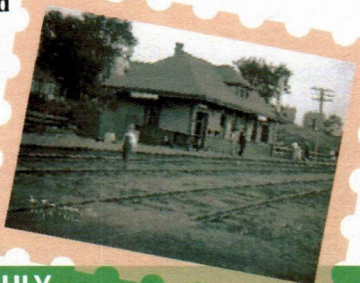
MOUNTAIN DIVISION RAILROAD LINE

Doug Noble from the Baldwin Historical Society will be joining us to discuss the Mountain Division Railroad Line that once came through our town. Doug will illustrate and talk about the rail line, its stations, and other buildings along the line.

Date: Monday, June 22

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: The Little Meetinghouse 719 Roosevelt Trail, Windham



JULY

PRESUMPSCOT: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: WHERE HISTORY LIVES

Retired USM Professor Mike Shaughnessy will talk about the rich history of the Presumpscot River and its uses over the centuries.

Date: Monday, July 13 **Time:** 7:00 pm.

Place: The Little Meetinghouse

SEPTEMBER

ROOSEVELT TRAIL HISTORY TOUR

The Society will be open for another day of history when the Roosevelt Trail History Tour makes its way to our Village Green. All of the buildings on the Green will be open to the public with docents leading tours of each and talking about the history of these iconic buildings. There will be a 250th Birthday display and birthday cake on hand. We are just one of eight (+) Historical Societies open for the day, so plan on a trip through the Lakes Region and have some fun with history! We hope to see many of you there!

Date: Saturday, September 12 **Time:** 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Place: Windham Historical Society Village Green

OCTOBER



FOURTH ANNUAL FALL HARVEST FESTIVAL

The Fall Harvest Festival will be back for its fourth year! As in the past, there will be contests, history tours, live musical entertainment, a White Elephant Sale, a Maker's Market featuring crafters of all kinds, food, games, and fun galore!

In addition, to celebrate the 250th birthday of our nation, the Society has some exciting additions to mention. We have a 1776 exhibit set up in the Windham Center Library featuring period reproduction clothing and 18th-century artifacts that you won't want to miss.

We will also have a photo booth where, for a small fee, you can have your picture taken in Colonial garb. The cost for a photo will be \$1 for an individual and \$2 for family portraits. All proceeds will go toward renovations to the 1833 Old Town House.

We're still working on more details, so stay posted on Facebook, and we hope to see you at the fair!

Date: Saturday, October 10 **Time:** 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Place: Windham Historical Society Village Green

Rain Date: October 11

ANNUAL MEETING AND POTLUCK SUPPER

Come mix and mingle with other Society members while you hear about the past year's accomplishments and plans for the year ahead. Officer elections will be held and our legendary potluck supper will be served!

Date: Monday, October 26 **Time:** 5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Place: Friends Church, 374 Gray Road, Windham

NOVEMBER

ELECTION DAY BAKE SALE

Be sure to visit the Society at the polls this Election Day. As usual we will have a scrumptious assortment of baked goods for sale. All proceeds will go towards improvements to the Old Town House.

Date: Tuesday, November 3

Time: 7 a.m. - when all the goodies are gone.

Place: Windham High School Gym, 406 Gray Road, Windham



Curator's Corner

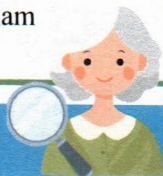
By Penny Loura

We received some wonderful memorabilia used by the 1960s and 70s Revolutionary War Re-enactors group, **The New Marblehead Militia, from Everett and Carole Millet**. Among the items we received are a Continental Army Officer's uniform, a ball gown, a drum from the Fife and Drum band, and a chest. All are on display in our 1776 exhibit in the Windham Center Library for the 2026 season.



Kelly Dearborn donated an 1873 Windham Annual Report.

Thank you



Queries

By Penny Loura

The Society gets many inquiries over the course of the year. I do my best to find information about each query that I receive. These are some I received over the past few months.

Kevin Gray from Paranormal Research was interested in stories about the Smith-Anderson Cemetery and **Walter Lunt** came to the rescue with an article he had written on the subject.

Debi Curry from MOCA was curious about the existence of a cemetery at the corner of William Knight and Gray Roads. According to our 1857 map, there appears to have been one where a house now stands. I sent Debi the names of three cemeteries in town that contain the "Knight" name.

A **Mr. Sykes** came in search of information about the Mayberry family and was hoping to obtain some old photographs. We think he will be paying us a visit now that the Society is open for the season.

George Snell III of the Company D Podcast is researching several unaccounted-for soldiers from the 3rd Maine Infantry. I contacted **Alan Anderson**, who does a lot of similar research, and he forwarded his findings to Mr. Snell. Thank you, Alan!

We also received an inquiry from **Patty Buck** about when the first shopping center came to North Windham. She specifically mentioned the IGA Grocery Store. My best guess is the 1940s, but I could find no specific groundbreaking information.

Donations

By Penny Loura and Walter Lunt

We would like to thank the following people for their generous donations:

Becky Delaware made a donation towards 1833 Old Town House renovations.

Windham Primary School's Third Graders made a generous donation to the Society. It was delivered by their teacher **Marc Miller**.

Roberta and John Morris kindly donated to the Society in memory of **Don Rich**.

Dick and Jill Hoar of Raymond donated two benches to the Village Green. Our visitors will surely delight in

having a comfortable place to rest while touring the grounds. The benches will be sanded and painted by volunteers and will be ready for events on the Village Green this season.



Condolences

By Carol Manchester

It gives me great pleasure to say that for another quarter, the Windham Historical Society has lost no members.

Membership News

By Carol Manchester

No new members have joined us this quarter. We currently have 242 individual members.

I Want to Join!

Fill out the form below and write a check made payable to the Windham Historical Society. Mail to:

Windham Historical Society, PO Box 1475, Windham, ME 04062

Individual Membership ☐ \$15 Family Membership ☐ \$25
Lifetime Membership ☐ \$100 per person

Name: _____

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Email: _____ Phone: _____

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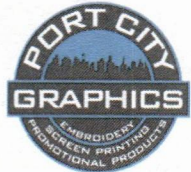
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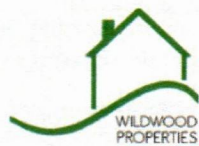
JOHN DEERE



SUNSET FARMS
Lee Allen
7 Cartland Road
Windham, ME (207)
228-3441



The Rich Family in
memory of Don
Rich

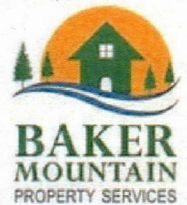


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