

Three Score and Ten Union Society:

Being Autobiographical Accounts
of the Experiences

By Some Early Residents
of Stowe, Vermont

Recorded in 1874-1875

Layton
almost blind

The Stowe-Morristown- Johnson Poor Farm

Virtually every Vermont town had problems with paupers to which town records attest. Before 1859, funds were voted by the Town of Stowe to care for the poor. The destitute person was auctioned off at vendue to the highest bidder who received the voted funds, and "kept" the person, providing him or her with shelter, food, and clothing. The overseer of the poor kept the ledger of incoming and outgoing monies. Trying to keep the demands for funds to a minimum, the town "warned out" potential



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Open area in left of photo is the site of the Stowe-Morristown-Johnson Poor House from 1859 to 1895 when the building burned. The house on the right is now owned by Marc Bregman on the Stowe-Morrisville Road, Route 100.

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PHOTO CREDIT: KATE H. HEANUE

Map strip of "Morristown," from Beers' Atlas 1878, showing location of poor farm.

paupers, and those who might become a problem. By 1859 they would not be responsible for their maintenance. The place of residence given. The December 1816.

In 1859 the towns of Stowe and Morrisville agreed to purchase a farm where the cost of their maintenance. based upon their respective populations on the Stowe-Morristown Bregman home.

The healthy and able-bodied men and women, with the cattle, farm the cost of their self-sustaining existence. Produce included milk, cream, and hay. The responsibilities as they could be placed in the "poorhouse" to live was an embarrassment.

The system worked well where the residents lived. The Jeffersonville List, Morristown, then of Glendale, California, farm when he lived one farm. how to develop a rundown farm into its income. His ideas were given a chance to try them out before Smith remembers "one in a cold night on which to amputated." He used crutches and not get along. Smith frequently received a lot of mail from the post office to him, so the postman delivered to the lame man. In the summer, Smith relates, there was a mystery to some, but not to the fellow without feet grown in an outbuilding with bars. His window at his father's farm. He thinks, the lame man set

On October 3, 1895, a newspaper relating that the



PHOTO CREDIT: KATE H. HEANUE

1878, showing location of poor

paupers, and those who might become undesirables, to leave town before they became a problem. By his practice a town publicly announced that they would not be responsible for the care of the poor. Names of families were recorded in the earliest town records, sometimes with their previous place of residence given. This practice seems to have ended in Stowe by December 1816.

In 1859 the towns of Stowe, Morristown, and Johnson joined together to purchase a farm where the indigent of all three towns could share the cost of their maintenance. The expenses were apportioned to each town based upon their respective grand lists. The farm was located in Morristown on the Stowe-Morristown Road (now Route 100) south of the present Marc Bregman home.

The healthy and able-bodied poor farm residents were expected to help with the cattle, farm the crops, and generally contribute to the mainly self-sustaining existence. Principal income was derived from the sale of milk, cream, and hay. The mentally and physically handicapped had such responsibilities as they could handle, but most people felt that "going to the poorhouse" to live was the worst that could happen to them. It was an embarrassment.

The system worked well until September 26, 1895 when the buildings where the residents lived burned. A lengthy letter to the editor of the *Jeffersonville List*, Morrisville, (September 20, 1933) from Clement F. Smith, then of Glendale, California describes the running of the three-town poor farm when he lived one farm away. He had some creative ideas such as how to develop a rundown 12 cow farm into a 40 cow farm to increase its income. His ideas were taken under advisement, but he never had a chance to try them out before the big barn and outbuildings burned. Clement Smith remembers "one inmate at the farm, a youngish man quite well educated, but there as a pauper because some months before, he had picked a cold night on which to get drunk and froze his feet so they had to be amputated." He used crutches to get around. He and the caretaker could not get along. Smith frequently settled quarrels between them. The lame man received a lot of mail, but the caretaker would not take it from the post office to him, so the postmaster would give bundles of mail to Smith to deliver to the lame man. It was on a very hot day at the end of the summer, Smith relates, that the buildings burned. "How it happened was a mystery to some, but not to me. The hatred between the caretaker and the fellow without feet grew worse." This man was kept in a small room in an outbuilding with bars on the only window and the door locked. From his window at his father's house, Smith could see a flame coming from the roof of the big barn where the man was a prisoner. Somehow, Smith thinks, the lame man set the fire, although nothing could be proven.

On October 3, 1895, a small item appeared in the *News & Citizen* weekly newspaper relating that the town officers of Morristown met to discuss the

The Poor Farm Buildings Burned.

The poor farm owned and operated jointly by the towns of Morristown, Johnson and Stowe, was the scene of a disastrous fire at about two o'clock last Thursday morning. The fire, evidently of an incendiary origin, started in the center of the large barn and was beyond any possibility of control when the family and inmates of the house were awakened. The fire spread very rapidly and it was impossible to liberate the stock, resulting in the burning of twenty-one head, all the hay and grain, most of the farming implements, etc. The horses, and nearly all that was of any value in the house, were gotten out to a place of safety, but all the buildings were burned flat. The inmates were taken to the house below, Mr. Dyke's, where they are comfortably housed.

The insurance—three thousand dollars—was divided, seventeen hundred being on buildings, and thirteen on contents, and was placed in the Union Mutual of Montpelier, through Powers & Cheney's agency. The company was represented here by Mr. Kemp of Montpelier on Saturday, when the loss was adjusted with promptness and fairness. The loss, though not immense in proportions, will be something of an item to the towns interested. Just what the future action may be is not definitely settled upon at present.

*Clipping of the
article from the
News and
Citizen,
September 26,
1895, page 1,
reporting the poor
farm burned.*

PHOTO CREDIT:
KATE H. HEANUE

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Three Score and Ten me Ham, Miss Lydia Deane, M Jeremiah Culver, Edward M who threatened to freeze or s of Jake Cady, who Chase s Superintendent of the Poor Savage States:

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duties of the town "regarding the care of present or possible paupers," and whether or not the town would continue caring for them together with the towns of Stowe and Johnson. Subsequently in 1899, Stowe purchased the John Drugg farm in Stowe at the juncture of the present Route 100 and Stagecoach Road, a two-story brick house built by Major Nehemiah Perkins. This house was used as the Stowe poor farm until 1948 when it was sold, "partly from lack of patronage."

Three Score and Ten members who went to the poor house were Francis Ham, Miss Lydia Deane, Mrs. Sybil (Potter) Pattengal, Asenath Story, Jeremiah Culver, Edward Moody and his wife Christine, and Seth Chase who threatened to freeze or starve to death before he would go there because of Jake Cady, who Chase said was "darned ugly." In the "Report of the Superintendent of the Poor Farm Association," February 15, 1875, R. A. Savage States:

"... We have at the farm, the following named persons, viz: Lydia Dean and Jason Cady who went to the farm in 1862; Sybil Pettingill in 1865; Francis Ham in 1866; [and three others, not Three Score members]. These seven have been supported during the whole year. Seth Chase who has been at the farm, periodically, for the past few years, has been at the farm the last three months..."

Other expenditures include:

"For Ed[mund] Moody, 12 cords wood \$36., keeping cow one year \$40., medical attendance \$5.25 = \$81.25.

For Seth Chase, \$4.18.

For Jeremiah Culver, \$9.00."

The fiscally responsible administration and watchful local control made this system of early welfare a success. For the impoverished, the mentally and physically infirm, and simply those with no other place to live, it was a home.



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FORMER OWNERS 1948-1969

Stowe Poor Farm 1899-1947. Major Nehemiah Perkins came to Stowe from Westminster and built this stagecoach tavern c. 1803. Located on the Stagecoach Rd. at the junction of the Stowe-Morrisville Rd. (Route 100), it is one of the oldest brick houses in town. Three Score and Ten Society member Augusta (Raymond) Perkins was the wife of Orrin Perkins, a son of Nehemiah.

The following four pages show the Annual Report, Town of Stowe, year ending February 24, 1876, pp. 5-8, with reports of the Poor Farm Superintendent and Overseer of the Poor.

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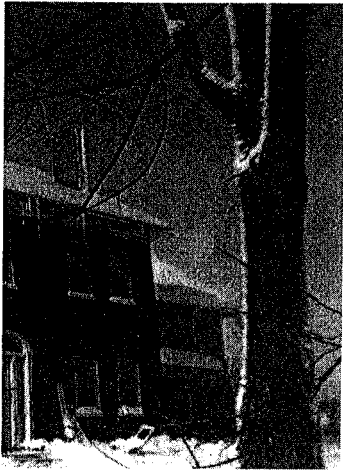
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ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
Selectmen and other Officers
OF THE
FINANCIAL CONDITION
OF THE
TOWN OF STOWE
FOR THE
Year Ending February 24, 1876.
ALSO THE REPORT OF THE
SUPERINTENDENTS
OF THE
POOR HOUSE ASSOCIATION.

MONTPELIER, VT.:
ARGUS AND PATRIOT STEAM JOB PRINTING HOUSE.
1876.