

Webster History Reports

For the Years 2019, 2021, and 2022

WEBSTER IN 2019

January and February provided significant snowfall, bitter cold, and strong north winds that depleted moisture from small trees and backyard landscaping. Many shrubs didn't survive due to the winter wind and a non-existent spring. We went from winter weather right into summer heat. The average high temperature in January was 30 degrees; February 31 degrees. Yet in March there were six days over 50 degrees and April there were 15 days over 60 degrees. It was a great season for maple syrup, but only if you started early.

Town meeting was held on March 16. Due to the resignation of the Town Moderator, David Richardson presided. The results of the prior Tuesday's election were: Bianca Acebron Peco for Select Board; Mike Jette for Moderator; Cemetery Trustee, Matthew Cummings; Library Trustee, Marty Bender; Trustee of Trust Funds, Therese Larson. With the election of Bianca Acebron Peco, the Select Board became the first all-female Select Board in Webster history.

Nanci Scofield, the chair, resigned on December 2, and Dee Blake was appointed to complete Nanci's term. Special thanks to Nanci for her years of service to the town, and for her ability to negotiate a beneficial contract with Granite Apollo, the company that will be erecting a large solar farm on the old Hopkinton-Webster landfill. One hundred- thirty acres of the 240 total acres will be used for the array. Granite Solar will make payment in lieu of taxes, providing revenue to the town. As for taxes, the tax rate increased by .42 per thousand of assessed value this year, unless you had property in Pillsbury Lake District. Property owners of PLD paid an additional .44 per thousand of assessed value. The Select Board worked diligently to meet the needs of the town while keeping costs and the environment in the forefront. For example, the Town Hall and Public Safety Building were refurbished with LED lighting for better lighting, lower operating costs and concern for the environment.

The Pillsbury Lake District is an active part of town. While a separate district within the town, many of the events held within this community were open to all town residents. If you liked to socialize while you eat, you could attend any of these following events: the New Year's Day Brunch, St. Patrick's Corned Beef Pot Luck, *Cinco de Mayo* Pot Luck, an Ice Cream Social, a Wine and Cheese tasting event, Chili Pot Luck, and a peach jam making class taught by Dodie Roberts. There were other craft classes offered, as well. There were several moonlight kayaking events with refreshments served after in people's homes. It's a wonder anyone in Pillsbury Lake can fit into their kayaks after all these delicious dining opportunities. Pillsbury Lake residences that rely on the Pillsbury Lake water system experienced water shortages throughout the fall. This is a serious condition and efforts are being made by Pillsbury Lake Management to address the problem.

The Webster Elementary School children were provided the opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities like the STEM club, Basketball club, Adventures in Peacemaking, and Girls on the Run. February was the "I Love to Read Month" and the Webster Parent Teacher Organization sponsored an author visit from local graphic novelist Merek Bennet. March included an "I Love Math Week." Field trips during May and June included the Montshire Museum, Capital Center for the Arts, Squam Lakes Science Center, and the 4th grade visit to the State House. In addition, there were trips to the Flume and Cannon Mountain. There was an opportunity to learn about ecology when Chris Schadler of the Conservation Commission visited the 3rd grade. The Webster Fire Department conducted lessons on Fire Safety. The Webster Police Department with the Merrimack County Sheriff's Department completed the DARE program with the 5th graders. The school was once again recognized as a "Blue Ribbon School" by the 2019 NH Partners in Education Celebration of Volunteers. It seems

appropriate to thank the very active PTO, Principal Stephanie Wheeler and the following teachers for their continued dedication to our children:

Kindergarten:	Kali Mara
Grade 1:	Lauren Rivet
Grade 2:	Courtney Morton
Grade 3:	Cheri Perelli
Grade 4:	Joe Gunnison
Grade 5:	Jess Perkins

The Webster Free Public Library's eclectic collection is continually being updating by librarian, Cathryn Clark-Dawe. The library continued in 2019 to enhance the community's intellectual and creative pursuits by offering diverse activities to Webster residents. Free movies were shown in the Town Hall each month. The book club met monthly. The summer reading program for children was well attended and concluded with a presentation of *Magic by George*. Dot Bourque offered computer classes to the public. The Library supplied the Webster Food Pantry with Celebration Bags, sent new resident letters to people who moved into town, and continued the tradition of offering passes to the Currier Museum, Mt. Kearsarge Indian Museum, NH Telephone Museum, SEE Science Center, Strawberry Banke Museum, and NH State Parks. In conjunction with the Conservation Commission, Andrew Timmons gave a talk on bears in New Hampshire, Donna Miller of *Petals in the Pines* talked about pollinators, and David Carroll, our local turtle expert, gave an excellent presentation describing his decades of working with turtles. Who knew that Webster has a local turtle expert?

The Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House, also known as the Webster Historical Society, was focused this past year on offering programs to raise awareness of the importance of the Meeting House and its historical artifacts. In addition to holding an Open House every weekend in July and August, the Historical Society hosted a Memorial Day program and, later, a Round-Robin tour of the Webster, Salisbury and Andover Historical Societies for the Webster Elementary School children. The Society offered two educational programs: "Going to School: Education in Early New Hampshire" and "Along the Abenaki Trail," and two musical programs: "Lift Up Your Voices" by Wayne Santos and George Sillars and a Harvest Day Celebration with "Music from the Woods" by James Pero and Stan Arthur. The Meeting House was open during Webster's Old Home Day and provided the building to the church for the Old Home Day Sunday service.

A major accomplishment for the Society in 2019 was the implementation of the Webster Digital Archive. The Society and the Library together purchased a computer for the sole purpose of containing the digital assets of the both organizations, town public documents, and accessing and storing archival materials. The Digital Archive contains all of the Town Reports (except 1862), and all town meeting minutes that exist. The Archive is available to the public and contains thousands of historical records, including photographs. You can log on by going to <https://websterhistoricalsociety.org> and selecting Webster Digital Archive from the black menu bar. Select either Artifacts or Town of Webster.

The main focus of the Society has been the restoration of the Meeting House. The goal for 2019 was to address the moisture retention problem identified last year by John Garvin, Architectural Historian for the Division of Historical Resources for the State of NH. In 2019 Wet Basement Solutions installed a vapor barrier to cover the dirt floor and side walls and

sealed the basement windows. This will prevent moisture from entering the inside of the Meeting House and from exiting through the walls and clapboards, causing the paint to peel. Quotes were requested to restore the windows and to repair and/or replace the clapboards. See separate document regarding the Meeting House. Much has been done this year, but much remains to be done. Substantial funds are required to preserve this historical building.

Another restoration in progress was that of the Webster Congregational Church. The Church is a beautiful, historic worship space and the membership has undertaken for several years the restoration of the building. As always, there were many volunteers who contributed. In 2019, the Coy family painted the front lower exterior, and two electricians, Wayne Chalker and Jon Hunt, upgraded some wiring. The church contracted with Chris Waddell Painting of Hopkinton to refurbish the ceiling of the sanctuary and second floor walls. There are several remarkable photos of the scaffolding required for this difficult job. The next project is the restoration of the windows. The Church held many fundraisers, including town suppers, food sales, and a town Christmas craft fair. The Church Food Booth at the Hopkinton Fair, under the leadership of John and Terri Martin, was a successful fundraiser. These events, importantly, provided an opportunity for dozens of community members to gather for a good time.

But the church is more than the building. During the three weeks of restoration, the church held services in the Town Hall. During one of those services, a baby was baptized. For a second year, the church held a worship service in August at the old swimming hole where four people were baptized in the Blackwater River. The Reverent David Richardson, pastor of the church, performed 14 memorial services during the year, not all for members of the church.

The Webster Women's Union is an organization whose purpose is to promote fellowship among women and to serve the needs of the town. The membership has dwindled to ten women, so an increased membership is needed. The Women's Union receives 50% of the proceeds from the summer church suppers. During 2019 the group donated over \$1400 to the following organizations:

Webster Food Pantry
Friends of Forgotten Children
Family victims of a house fire
Family whose father was severely injured
Webster Historical Society
Webster Food Booth
Webster Church for Thanksgiving Fruit Baskets
Webster Church for either a new PA system or stove

Sincere appreciation is extended to everyone who assisted in creating this report. Any omissions or errors were not intentional.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen R. King

Webster in 2021

The purpose of these yearly reports is to create a written history that can be used by someone, years from now, to write a more complete history of the town. Note: Coffin's *History of Boscaawen and Webster 1733-1878*, and *Webster New Hampshire History 1933-1983*. Because there was no report for the year 2020, it is imperative to start the history of 2021 by considering Covid-19 and its effects on the town, state and world. 2021 was the second year of Covid, and it's been exhausting.

Covid-19, an acute respiratory syndrome first appeared in the United States in March 2020. It quickly became a national concern when hospitals were overrun with patients, many of whom died. A shortage of ventilators, PPE and face masks put extreme pressure on hospitals, where doctors, nurses and first responders worked heroically to save lives. At the time of this writing, 265,140 people in New Hampshire have had the virus and 2,145 people have died. There have been over 800,000 deaths in the United States and 6 million worldwide.

Nothing can be written about Webster in 2021 without emphasizing the effect Covid-19 and its Omicron variant has had on the town. Subsequent to the Governor's Executive Order 2020, businesses, social organizations, the Church, and the Town Offices were closed or turned to online services. Teachers and students turned to online education. Social distancing, ventilation of indoor spaces, hand washing and hand sanitizers became the norm. People stayed home. They gardened or completed house repairs. When restrictions relaxed in mid-2021 and doors were opened, the Select Board issued a Covid-19 Public Safety Policy requiring that everyone over 2 years of age be required to wear a mask in the Town Offices and the Public Safety Building. A resurgence in late 2021 required a return to precautions. So, how has Webster coped? We are a sturdy stock, and much has been accomplished during the year.

The Select Board voted in January 2021 to use YouTube to Live Stream its meetings. Those physically present at meetings were required to wear face masks and to social distance. During the course of the year, the Select Board and Mr. Hadley completed many projects, including the updating of the Town Hall emergency lights and inspection of the emergency suppression system. Two stoves donated to the Town by the Church were installed. The water was tested and, later, a failed pump was replaced. The Town Hall and Library parking lots were paved by GMI Asphalt Paving from Belmont for \$23,565.00. There were legal concerns regarding the sale of town-owned property, and a kitchen fire in another town-owned property. For a more detailed report of accomplishments, see "Report from the Select Board." All were completed with little affect to the tax rate due to the use of federal and state funds procured by the Select Board and Mr. Hadley. The Clothespin Bridge is on target to be replaced in 2022, and once the Select Board receives an MOU from Oliverwood, the large solar project should be started.

Town meeting was held on April 17th at the Webster Elementary School with Moderator Michael Jette presiding. All warrant articles were recommended by the Select Board and all passed. Because of decreased revenues from the State, the budget was higher than the previous year. A warrant article: "The New Hampshire Resolution for Fair Nonpartisan Redistricting" passed. Questions at the end of the meeting concerned the replacement of Clothespin Bridge Road (anticipated in 2022) and the bridge near Knight's Meadow Marsh on White Plains Road.

Town Clerk Michele Derby provided service for many months from the Public Safety Building. Once moved back to the Town Hall, Michele and Russ Tatro's offices were able to remain open to the public due to plexiglass barriers that were erected to protect the citizens and employees. Residents were also encouraged to leave their transactions in the drop box or mail them in.

Police and Fire personnel continued to work for the benefit of the town. These Departments had a difficult year due to a serious house fire and a fatal car accident in March, and another building fire due to arson in September. Much is owed to these men and women for their commitment during such a difficult year. Training continued for our police force and firefighters, under the direction of Police Chief Steve Adams and Fire Chief Emmet Bean.

The Merrimack Valley School Board hired the NH School Administrators Association to conduct a Small School Study to assess the effectiveness of education in the Webster and Salisbury Elementary Schools. The intent was to ensure that students in small schools have the same academic and social opportunities as those students in larger schools. Salisbury's smallest class has 8 students; Webster has 11. Led by Mike Jette (former MVHS principal) and Bruce Johnson (retired MV Reading Specialist), a community meeting was organized with school board members and guests from Salisbury in attendance. This meeting provided an explanation of the decision process, answers to questions from the public, and the opportunity for parents to express their concerns. On October 11, the School Board decided not to consider any action that involved closing either school. This decision proves the power of public involvement in local action.

The Webster Historical Society has had a very productive year. (See their report elsewhere in this Town Report.) The Society has completed two-thirds of its ambitious renovation project with the last phase, painting the building, to be completed in 2022 at a cost of \$32,500.00. In 2021 the Society received an LCHIP grant for \$38,100.00, a NH Preservation Alliance grant for \$7,500.00, and over the past five years \$50,000.00 from the Town. Renovating old buildings is an expensive but rewarding endeavor. The Society continued to offer services to the Town by expanding its web-based archive, offering a web-based genealogy, and holding an online auction which netted almost \$9,000.00.

Under the leadership of Rev. David Richardson, the First Congregational Church of Webster continued to meet during the year by following all recommended Covid-19 protocols. The Church met outdoors, and social-distanced when indoors. The Church continues to be a beautiful, historical building that welcomes all to worship. The normally highly-attended Christmas Eve service was once again offered online. While there are only about sixty active members who continue to support the work of the Church, both financially and spiritually, there are many other people in the area who are generous when called upon. The Church sponsors the Webster Food Pantry, managed by Peg Foss, which is open on the first Wednesday of each month or by appointment. The Hopkinton Fair Food Booth is one of the biggest fundraisers, and it operated this year with reduced staff and a smaller menu. The Church wishes to express appreciation to all who contributed in any way, and especially to Terry and John Martin and to Jeanne Chwasiak, who worked countless hours at the fair. The passing of Faith Anderson in July and Sandra Starkey in September was deeply felt by those who knew and loved them.

The Webster Free Public Library continued to offer an eclectic collection - both intellectually stimulating and just-for-fun books. Due to Covid, a "Porch Pick-Up" option was created. Librarian Cathryn Clark-Dawe continually updated the collection and published the new acquisitions in the monthly Grapevine. Offerings included audio books, eBooks, Dvd's, museum and park passes - even a telescope is available

to sign out. The Library continued to offer diverse activities to residents of all ages. The Summer Reading Program and the 1000 Books Before Kindergarten Program remained popular, although smaller groups participated this year. The Library offered monthly movie night, with Marty Bender serving as “main host.” The Book Club also met monthly on zoom. A thank you to Trustee members Nancy Pitchall-French, Leslie Collins and Marty Bender who met monthly with Cathryn. Meetings are open to the public and masks are required. You may have noticed the new landscaping around the Library – a lovely addition.

There are numerous committees in Town, for example, the Conservation Commission, the Parks Committee, and the Planning Board, that would welcome additional interested members. If you would like to know more about the committees, Minutes and Agendas are available on the Town website.

The NH Audubon Society awarded the Goodhue-Elkins Award to Betsy Janeway for her outstanding contributions to educating people about NH birds and for her tireless work to protect birds and other NH wildlife. One of the highlights of the Grapevine is the highly informative and often humorous *Nature Notes* that Betsy writes each month. Many of us enjoy checking in with Betsy each month to see just what she’s been up to.

Tara Gunnigle and Jon Pearson received the 2021 First Amendment Award from the Nackey S. Loeb School of Communication. Another example of community involvement. Come and join a group.

Webster in 2022

Webster and surrounding areas continued to have unusual weather conditions during the year. According to NOAA, the year 2022 was the 6th warmest year on recorded history. Continued warming of the New England coastal waters caused the land mass to also warm, bringing more rainfall and less snowfall. In January and February of 2022, the Webster area experienced just two snowfalls. The warmer temperatures caused the snow to melt, creating high water for the Blackwater and for surrounding brooks, with subsequent threat of local flooding. Summer brought short periods of drought followed by heavy rainstorms. The 2022 fall and winter seasons were mild.

Our little town is part of the larger world community. Nation-wide delivery issues, staff shortages, and availability of products made merchandize scarce. Record inflation of 8.7% was evident, with the cost of groceries quite high. In January of 2022, the cost of one dozen eggs was \$1.65. In December, the cost was close to \$4.50. If you were lucky, a local farmer would sell you a dozen for \$3.50. The cost to heat our homes this year was higher. Fuel prices per gallon as of December 2022: Gas: \$3.69; Propane: \$3.72; Oil: \$4.63 (down from \$5.93); and seasoned cordwood anywhere from \$300 to \$525.00 a cord.

The Town Report for 2021 was dedicated to three Webster residents that the community lost during the prior year: Faith Anderson, Cyndel Roberts Donoghue, and Robert Drown. Each one contributed to the town in her or his own way, and continue to be missed. This year's report is dedicated to Michele Derby, who resigned as Town Clerk in December after providing 15 years of excellent service.

During Town Meeting on March 12, voters approved a \$1,651,900 budget, an increase of less than 1% of the 2021 operating budget. Roy Fanjoy successfully proposed an amendment to add \$15,000 to the budget to allow for higher fuel costs. Voters approved the purchase of a new police cruise for \$37,000, to be paid out of capital reserve funds.

Town elections were held on March 8th with 289 residents voting. Results were:

Moderator (2 years):	Mike Jette
Selectboard (3 years):	Normandie Blake
Treasurer (1 year):	Michele Tremblay
Supervisor of the Checklist (3 years):	Nancy Webster
Cemetery Trustee (3 years):	Matt Cummings
Library Trustee (3 years):	Martin Bender
Trustee of Trust Funds (3 years):	Theresa Larsen.

The Select Board, working with Town Administrator Dana Hadley, made progress this year on several projects. They reviewed and updated Town policies and ordinances, and personnel policies. The pad at the Public Safety Building was replaced. The project to digitize the town records began. Much thanks to Russell Tatro, Land Use Coordinator, for success with this project. Several town-owned properties in the Pillsbury Lake District were sold and returned to the tax rolls. Two properties (874 Battle Street and 1073 Corn Hill Road) that were deeded to the town in 2021 for unpaid taxes were also sold by sealed bid and returned to the tax rolls. After several years of inaction, the town now has a permit from NHDES to replace the culvert on White Plains Road. Completion of this project is expected in 2023. Federal and State funds will pay for the construction of the new Clothespin Bridge and the Town will pay for the engineering costs. Estimated completion time is 2024. Because the existing bridge was repaired this year, the replacement seems less urgent.

The tax rate for 2022 was set by the NH DRA on November 28th at \$22.85 (PLD add \$4.93) per thousand. The resulting annual tax bill for a home assessed at \$300,000 was \$6,855.00 (PLD \$8,334.00).

The Pillsbury Lake Village District spent much of the year working on water issues and trying to get the Clubhouse ready for rentals. A group called Love Our Lake was formed with the desire to improve access to the lake using de-weeding money raised by the district. In June, Pillsbury Lake hosted the Webster Gardeners plant swap, which was very successful. Everyone who attended the event went home with one or more plants and the knowledge on how to plant them. The October event was a town-wide Trunk or Treat, which was planned and run by volunteers. The final get-together was a Cookie Swap in December. Everyone went home with many homemade cookies for the holidays.

Elsewhere in this Town Report is news of the Webster Historical Society and the Town Library.

The Webster Congregational Church under the leadership of the Reverend David Richardson, welcomed seven new members and performed two baptisms in 2022. One baptism was for 17-day-old Mason Cheng, who was born in war-torn Ukraine. There are 35 to 50 people in attendance each Sunday morning. There are weekly coffee hours immediately after church each Sunday, and Bible study every Wednesday at noon. On Easter 2022, our annual Sunrise Service was held on Pearson Hill Road, and because concerns about Covid were waning, our Christmas Eve service returned to the Church rather than to an online service. Reverend Richardson is available for counsel, funeral, and marriage services. All are welcome.

In 2022 Terry and John Martin expressed to the Church Board of Trustees that they would no longer be able to lead the church booth. The discussions with the staff of the fair had also led Terry to believe the fair would prefer to rent out the space without the building on the grounds and we would not be allowed to sell the building. After more than 71 years of serving the Fair population, the Church decided to disassemble the building. We are grateful to Terry and John Martin for their many years of managing the booth. Thanks to Scott, Joanne, and Ashley Miller for selling some of the building's contents, to Paul King for dismantling the interior, and to Chuck Rose and Company, who razed and disposed of the empty building. The Church Fair Booth was a major fundraiser for the Church and will be missed.

Sponsored by the Library and initially led by Donna Frost, the new Webster Gardening Club quickly became a group of new and experienced gardeners who wished to share best practices in gardening. Speakers for the first meeting on March 17th were George Cummings, who spoke on composting, and Marty Bender, who spoke on seed starting. This active group met throughout the summer months, scheduled garden visits, plant and seed swaps. On September 14th, UNH Advanced Master Gardener Ron Trexler presented a program "Putting the Garden to Bed." Events were attended by anywhere from 6 to 30 people. The Club intends to maintain the gardens at the Library and the Church. Donna Kenney and Linda Clark are planning a full schedule for 2023.

The 106th observance of Old Home Day was held during the week of August 11 to 17th. The theme was in line with the Library summer reading program "Ocean of Possibilities". We had a story walk by the river featuring the book *Big Al* by Andrew Clements. The story walk was put out a week before Old Home Day and left up until after school begins. Paul King was our Grand Marshal. The parade was great fun followed by games at the park. A dunking tank, sand dig, grease pole, pie eating, egg toss, corn hole and horse shoes are just some of the activities. During our picnic lunch and into the afternoon we

listened to music by Bow Junction and the First Congregational Church of Webster members served lemonade and watermelon.

Committee Members: Heidi Ohlson, Chair

Abby Blanchette, Kristen Ohlson, and Terry Ohlson-Martin

With support from Nick Campo, Hayley Weeks Campo, John Martin, Amanda Cummings, Travis Heath, Emmett Bean, Alan Martin and Nancy Rosborough and Jake Drown.

The New England Division Slalom Championships for canoes and kayaks was held on the Blackwater on April 23. This event has been held in Webster since 1984. The course is designed for levels beginner to advanced and has numerous challenging gates. It's a great event to watch from shore, especially with a camera.

During 2022, two much-loved teachers passed away. George Radcliffe, aged 85, lived most of his life in Webster and taught third and then fifth grade. His students excelled in math. After retirement in September 1996, Mr. Radcliffe earned his living as a house painter, storyteller, gardener and house sitter. He was a founding member of the Central NH Storytelling Guild. Elizabeth "Betty" Morse also passed away after a lengthy illness. Betty taught first grade at Webster Elementary School for many years and lived in Webster before moving to Penacook. First known as Mrs. Hubbard, and then Mrs. Morse, Betty was a long-time member of the Webster Church, and is remembered and loved by many.

The Merrimack Valley School District annual meeting was held on March 4 at 7pm in the MVHS gym. Voting took place from 11:00am to 7:00pm with everyone wearing masks by observing NH DHHS Covid-19 recommendations. The \$44.5 million budget was approved.

During 2022, Webster Elementary School had approximately 90 students, kindergarten through Grade 5. The dedicated faculty and staff worked collaboratively to create a safe and supported learning environment for all students. Staff are:

Stephanie Wheeler, Principal

Beth Silver, Administrative Assistant

Stephanie Horne, Guidance

Alex Duffy, Kindergarten

Lauren Rivet, Grade 1

Grace Pecci, Grade 2

Cheri Perelli, Grade 3

Nicole Hodgdon, Grade 4

Jasmine Wyatt, Grade 5

Jessica McWhinnie, Reading Specialist

Theresa Barger, Reading Tutor

Sarah Bouchard, French

Heather Parker, Spanish

Trina Patenaude, Art

Jaelyn Chaffee, Music

Sue Staples, Physical Education.

There are approximately 18 more administrative and teaching assistants. Recognized for their many years of service to the students were: Jodi Allen, 10 years Head Cook, Wendy Evangelo, 15 years

Classroom Assistant, and Marie Jones, 30 years Nurse. The Webster Elementary PTO is an active group that, among other activities, hosted a Town-Wide Year Sale on May 21 with profits from the \$10 registration fee and sale of \$2 maps going directly to benefit the school.

Lead has been present in the school for quite some time, so bottled drinking water has been available. However, lead was also recently found in one faucet and five sinks. Those six areas have been marked and will be scheduled for replacement.

Karen R King
With help from her friends