

Wilmot Historical Society



In 2007, Wilmot, New Hampshire, celebrated the 200th birthday of its founding. At that time, the Wilmot Historical Society put together town tours as part of the celebrations. This year the Society has updated those tours and has posted them on its website to be printed out for anyone who is curious about Wilmot and its history.

The tours, then and now, are based loosely on how the various Wilmot towns were laid out. What were once three or four towns became one over time—with four distinct sections—Kearsarge Mountain, Wilmot Flat, Wilmot Center and North Wilmot. Not so long ago there was an East Wilmot as well, a small section that we've included with the tour of Wilmot Center. This section was once known as New Chester - it was not unusual for town lines to be redrawn as towns were settled and populations grew.

While these four driving tours of our 19,000+/- acre town are fairly inclusive, more information on Wilmot is available in Cap LeVarn's *General History* and Florence Langley's more detailed three volume set, all available at the Wilmot Public Library, 11 North Wilmot Road. While supplies last, the Bicentennial sponsored town history, "Home to the Mountain" is also available for free in the library and on request from the Wilmot Historical Society.

For safety reasons, we do not advise driving off the route and down the many narrow dirt roads you will pass. Many are Class VI roads and some are not maintained in winter. Also, please respect private property by not trespassing.

Enjoy the tours!

The Wilmot Historical Society board of directors.

September 2020

TOUR OF WILMOT CENTER

When the population of Wilmot was at its height, it consisted of four villages: Wilmot Flat, Wilmot Center, East Wilmot and North Wilmot. This tour takes you from Wilmot Flat to Wilmot Center via Campground Rd and then over to East Wilmot. From the post office, drive to the intersection of Campground and Cross Hill Roads next to the Blackwater River Bridge.

#1. The lot on the corner on your left was the location of a “potato barn” between 1943 and 1948. During World War II and following, potatoes were a mainstay of the diets of people in this area. There were potato fields on top of Granite Hill and other places in town as well as in many surrounding towns. Thousands of bushels of “spuds” were stored and processed here. The majority of the grocery stores locally and as far away as Concord sold potatoes distributed from this location. The barn was built mostly underground and outside exposed walls were banked up with soil. This insulation protected the potatoes from outside temperature extremes without refrigeration. This business also provided much needed employment for people, especially women and school children, during those hard times. Sorting, grading, packaging and preparation of seed potatoes required many hours of careful work.

#2. From here, head out Campground Road toward Route 4A and in less than 1/10th of a mile on the left there is a small home set back in a clearing, but between the 1840s and 1938, the surrounding level area was a beautiful pine grove interspersed with cottages and a chapel. This was the location of the Methodist Campground. It was the site of summer revival meetings in the 1850s, where people from all over the area came for Bible preaching and socials. According to “With Prayer and Psalm” by Florence Langley, the meetings began in 1841 and continued for more than 70 years. Old Home Days also were held here until the area was devastated by the hurricane of 1938.

#3. When you reach the end of Campground Road you come to New Hampshire Route 4A, which is also known as the Fourth New Hampshire Turnpike. It was originally a toll road built about 1806 as a route from Concord to Hanover. Daniel Webster walked from Salisbury to Dartmouth College on this road when it was first built. Turn left on Route 4A and you will pass a lovely green house on your right, and including the buildings on the left, this was a mink farm in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s and later a pheasant farm. As you continue, on the left you will see the Wilmot Highway Department displaying a V- shaped snowplow that was used for narrow one lane town roads in the 1940s. It cleared the snow to both sides with one pass.

#4. A little farther on the right you will see Patterson Road and across from it a wooded area. In 1860 Daniel and Amanda Upton and their 7 children lived there in a small wood home. When 46-year-old Daniel died that year, his oldest child was Lucien age 22 and the youngest Ida was 1 year old. Within 2 years, the 2nd son Nathaniel joined the army and soon Lucien followed. Amanda, like the many women in Wilmot, struggled to keep her family fed and endured tremendous hardship and uncertainty at home while loved ones were off fighting. Like many Civil War soldiers, Lucien died in Louisiana of dysentery. The bronze statue on the Soldiers' Monument is Private Lucien.

#5. Continuing on Route 4A, turn right on North Wilmot Rd and cross the bridge over Kimpton Brook. Pull into the large parking lot on the right, across from the town hall and park your car for a little walking around. The hall was built in 1907, 100 years after the town was incorporated. It has always been used for town meetings and elections with voting on paper ballots with pencil. It was once the home of the Wilmot Grange and was used for social functions and many special events. Plans are in place to restore the building, which has been damaged by floodwaters over the years. Following the restoration, this lovely old building will be able to again accommodate community programs and theatrical productions.

#6. To the right of the hall, originally the District 1 Wilmot Center School, is the present Wilmot Town Library. It was the third or fourth school in Wilmot Center. Built in 1852 and used until 1965, it was sold to the town for one dollar when the Kearsarge Regional School District was organized. We recommend that you visit the library and see the window valances (with accompanying booklet) that were painted with scenes of many of the buildings you see on these tours. It is worth the stop. Connecting the library to the town hall, in the ell, is the Joyce Tawney Creativity Lab. It is named for a much-beloved 1st grade teacher and a wonderful friend of the library in every way. Her special project was promoting the importance of reading for children.

#7. To the right of the library is the Congregational Church. Between the library and the church, towards the back, stands a shed with horse stalls dating from the 1850s. Members of the church paid for deeds to the stall space as well as for the pews in which they sat on Sundays. The family names still identify the stalls' users and are named as "tenant owners." Although the church's history is rather unclear, we are inclined to accept the date on the front of the building of 1858 as the year the present church was built. \$100 pledges (representing three months wages in those days) paid for the construction, the total cost amounting to \$1500.

#8. A short walk up North Wilmot Road, in front of the lovely old house on the left, rests the church bell that belonged to the first union meeting house (Methodist). The church stood on this site from 1829 until it was hit by lightning and burned in 1957.

#9. Carefully, because it is a blind spot, cross the road to check the site and monument of the first "Town House" built in 1844. This building was used for early civic meetings and was eventually sold for \$20 and removed about 1907 when the new hall was built. (There is a picture of this building in *Glimpse of the Past*,* and it is portrayed on the valances in the library).

#10. Walk back down the hill past your car, and cross the bridge over Kimpton Brook. Just beyond it, turn into the little park on your right. Notice the beautiful stonework beside the river and under the bridge. Walk through this lovely little park created by, and named, in memory of Wilmot native Florence Langley. She was born and raised in the original Bunker homestead at the top of Bunker Hill where the Langley family has lived for over 100 years. After receiving her college degree from Simmons, she taught in secondary schools "down country." When she retired from teaching, she returned to Wilmot, did extensive research, and authored three excellent books relating to Wilmot's history.*

#11. From the park, you can see the large mansard-roof building across Route 4A. It was built in 1840, and in 1876 it was renovated and opened as the Kearsarge School of Practice. Starting in 1922, it served as Wilmot High School for three years. In 1971, it was renovated again and became the Academy Apartments, which it remains today.

#12. To the left of the apartment house is a large Cape Cod style building, which is one of several houses claiming the title of the oldest house in town. In the 1940s it was a private home that also housed the Wilmot Center Post Office. As early as 1818, town meetings were held here. The roof was raised in the 1970s during repairs following a fire.

#13. Still looking across 4A and to the right of Bunker Hill Road, the house on the corner was once the "Coffin Shop" owned by the Goodhues. Guess what they made and sold? The present building was moved to this location from its previous position as an out building following a fire that destroyed the original house. Across 4A from this house is an empty lot which was the site of two grocery stores, located there successively from 1880s to the 1960s.

#14. Return to your car, drive over the bridge to the stop sign at Route 4A, take a right then a quick left onto Bunker Hill Road. Drive up the hill and around the curve of the cemetery to the 3-way intersection with a pretty little triangle. This is the opposite end of Cross Hill Road where you started, but for this tour, turn around here and drive back to park in front of the first sign on the right at the gate for Bunker Hill Cemetery. We have ten cemeteries in Wilmot that are maintained by the town and cared for by the Cemetery Trustees. This cemetery is one of the oldest. When you walk up to the cemetery gate, you will see a flag flying at the back of the cemetery. It stands over the memorial site for Wilmot resident, Thelma Cuccinello, who was killed September 11, 2001 on American Airlines flight 11.

#15. Straight ahead and across the road you can see a three-sided enclosure made of large boulders built in 1860. This sizable structure is the "Town Pound" where stray farm animals were held until the owners came to claim them. It is amazing the things our forefathers were able to build without backhoes and bulldozers. The original Bunker homestead is to the left of the "Town Pound" on the corner. Back in your car, drive around the corner to another cemetery gate and sign in shrubbery. If you walk through this gate a few steps and look to the left, there are three very unique large grave markers. They are made of metal as opposed to the usual granite or marble markers. If you knock carefully on the side of one of them, you will notice that it is hollow.

#16. Return to your car and continue to the stop sign at the bottom of Bunker Hill. Take a right on 4A and quick left on to North Wilmot Road. Pass the library and continue 1.5 mi past many old farms until you get to Eagle Pond Road on your right and turn right.

#17. Continue about 2 miles past Camps Kenwood (est. 1930) and Evergreen. The first bridge you cross is at the end of Kimpton Brook (from Wilmot Center) as it flows into Eagle Pond. After you cross the rail trail and have good visibility to your left, stop and look across the field and notice the big old weathered barn and white farmhouse. (If you get out of the car, beware of roadside poison ivy.) This was the home of the late Donald Hall who died in 2017. He was the New Hampshire Poet Laureate from 1984 to 1989 and the US Poet Laureate from 2006 to 2007. His wife, Jane Kenyon, was New Hampshire Poet Laureate at the time of her death in 1995. Mr. Hall inherited this farm from his grandparents, Wesley and Kate Wells. It was Kate's ancestral home from before 1880. Mr. Hall's first novel, "String Too Short to be Saved," reflects his memories of visiting here when he was a young boy. Many of his poems beautifully describe his view of Kearsarge Mountain.

#18. Carefully turn left at the stop sign at Route 4, pass the Hall home and New Canada Road on the right. You will come to another of the town's earliest cemeteries, Eagle Pond Cemetery, on the right and on the left is the Northern Rail Trail. Since the last of the railroad trains passed through Wilmot in the 1970s, the rail beds have been converted to the longest rail trail in New Hampshire for recreational use, extending from Boscawen to Lebanon.

You may now continue on Route 4 and turn left on Jack Wells Road (past the Danbury town line), which will take you back to Eagle Pond Road, where a right turn will take you back to North Wilmot Road. There you may choose to go right to North Wilmot to take the North Wilmot Tour or left back to Wilmot Center.

*Notes: *Books by Florence Langley about Wilmot History are: When School Bells Rang, With Prayer and Psalm and A Glimpse of the Past.*

Tour of...

WILMOT CENTER

