

**'A TRANSPORTATION STORY'**

~  
*Authored and/or researched by;*

*Debra Lamson Perkins*

~  
*For*

~  
*The New London Historical Society*

~  
*2000 - 2001*

Corrected to 2004

M. Roy London

February 25, 1995

Dear Bill,

One Halloween night in the 1930,s (no earlier than 1937 and no later than 1940) four of us from New London High School "borrowed" the horse drawn hearse from Wilmot Center. I can't remember who the fourth participant was but it was the same group that "borrowed" Maud Swift's goat the following year. We drove from Onion Corner in Elkins to the Cemetery in Wilmot Center. Directly across from the Cemetery there is a house with a shed where the hearse was stored. The door was not locked. (Both the house and shed are still there.)

We towed the hearse to New London and then argued where to put it. I believe it ended up on the front steps of Colgate Hall.

The next morning the hearse had been moved to the rear of Colgate Hall. My father arrived there for a class and he looked out the back window. There was the hearse with two feet sticking out the back end. My father rushed out the back door and discovered Lee Welch resting on his back with his feet protruding from the back end of the hearse.

Someone must have towed the hearse back to Wilmot Center and I never heard anything about it untill last summer when I saw the hearse at the Historical Society when I attended the Boy's Club meeting.

M. R. L.

# **THE RECYCLED HEARSE**

~ ~ ~

## **New London Historical Society Program**

**January 21, 1997**

~ ~

**Introduced by Debra Lamson Perkins**

Welcome to the New London Historical Society.

This is a very exciting evening for me for a variety of reasons. First.... We have our favorite speakers..."Bud" Lauridsen and Bill Kidder. They are great friends, not only of each other but of the town of New London and most assuredly wonderful stewards of the New London Historical Society.

This program has caused me to look back at a bit of personal and family history. As a young girl I had the rare privilege and terrifying experience of accompanying the Wilmot Hearse from there to here. I rode "shot gun", so to speak, from a kneeling position in the Kidder Garage pickup truck. Looking backwards at my father sitting in the truck's bed, spread-legged and holding on to the hearse's shafts as Bill Kidder negotiated the gravel roads from Wilmot Center, through Elkins and on up the hills to New London. At times I thought the old conveyance would shake itself to pieces and I kept glancing at the men for signs of insanity. Obviously we made it! "They did know what they were doing."

(Since the evening of the program, Bill Kidder reminded me that we had made one stop, in Elkins, in front of Rufus E. Lamson's farmhouse. Seth had some notion that the sight of the old hearse would give his, "extraordinary", old uncle quite a fright. Rufus wasn't at home.)

Now I would like to tell you a bit about the Wilmot man who worked with this hearse. He was born in Dunbarton, New Hampshire in 1827. When he was eleven years of age, he and his family moved to North Wilmot. They settled on Tewksbury Hill in the neighborhood of the Josiah Stearns family which consisted of twenty-two children. One of whom, Susan, became his wife. As a man he stood an impressive 6'1", blond hair and blue eyed. He wore tiny circles of gold in each ear. (Since the program I have inherited the earrings and often wear them.) He served as Town Clerk for 25 years. He

was an inventor, farmer, cabinet maker and carpenter. He also practiced Homeopathic medicine. When his skills with herbs and potions failed to work, he made very fine caskets and undertook to bury his neighbors. His name was Seth Goodhue and he is one of my great-grandfathers.

I have portions of a letter to share with you which was written by Seth, to his brother, Dr. David Goodhue, who lived in Springfield, New Hampshire.

~ Wilmot - February 21, 1906 ~

David, I think you or someone else have got things a little twisted in the statements that I noticed in the Tuesday's *Globe*. I remember well of leaving Dunbarton. Luke and myself started on foot towards Concord as I knew the way. Mr. William Alexander and wife were coming to Wilmot and they with father and mother and the rest of the family were in two sleighs. We were overtaken when near three miles of Concord then we rode with Mr. And Mrs. Alexander and walked up hills. We overtook Jonathan with the ox team in Salisbury, he started with a heavy load of goods the day before and stayed over night at one of the William Garishes, the next day he stayed over night at the William Colbys at Potter Place and the third day came to North Wilmot.

I think you were more than fourteen years old when Father and Mother moved to Boscawen. I am quite sure that they lived in Wilmot in 1853 and I think later although I may be mistaken.

One thing is sure that time moves very fast and soon our work will be done. Wilmot can boast of having the undertaker who has been in business longer than any man in New England, as excerpt by Boston Papers. I have sold goods enough to bury every man, woman and child in Wilmot, New London and part of Springfield. It seems impossible but my books will prove it. Death is doing his work and if there is nothing better for man than he has in this life the whole work of the Almighty has been a failure from beginning to end and the Devil has shown himself to be the Master Workman in worldly affairs.

I will close, we are as well as usual. Kindest regards to family.

Yours very truly,

Seth Goodhue



**Debra Lamson Perkins**  
**Pictured at Bill Kidder's "Ice House"**  
**During the restoration of the Wilmot Hearse**  
**March ~ 1995**

*The New London Historical Society*  
*presents*

**Bill Kidder Sr.**  
**and Bud Lauridsen**  
**on**

**"The Recycled  
Hearse"**



Learn how the Wilmot hearse, through words, pictures and artifacts, became a restored treasure of the New London Historical Society. Equally fascinating is hearing about the research, design and execution of the Hearse House on the society's grounds.

Tuesday, January 21, 1997

Dessert at 7:00 pm

Program at 7:30 pm

Donation — members \$2, non-members \$3

*Snow date Tuesday, January 28, 1997.*

# to the Editor

## The Wilmot Town Hearse: Part Two

To The Editor,

I was indeed pleased to read Mary Petersen's article concerning the Wilmot Town Hearse which is now owned by the New London Historical Society, and I well remember how Bill Kidder and I acquired it back in the '40's.

It wasn't long after the end of World War II. Bill had returned from Germany and I had come home from the South Pacific. Bill and Petie and my late wife and I went to a Square Dance held at the Town Hall in Wilmot Center. During the evening Bill and I wandered out to the town horse sheds in back of the hall for some reason or another. It was there that we discovered the Wilmot Town Hearse. It seems that the first Selectman of Wilmot was also the Town Cop and was also on duty at the dance. So we promptly offered him \$10 for the vehicle. He allowed that this was a transaction of some magnitude which required a special meeting of the three selectmen and he would call such a meeting the next day. Sure enough, I received a call from

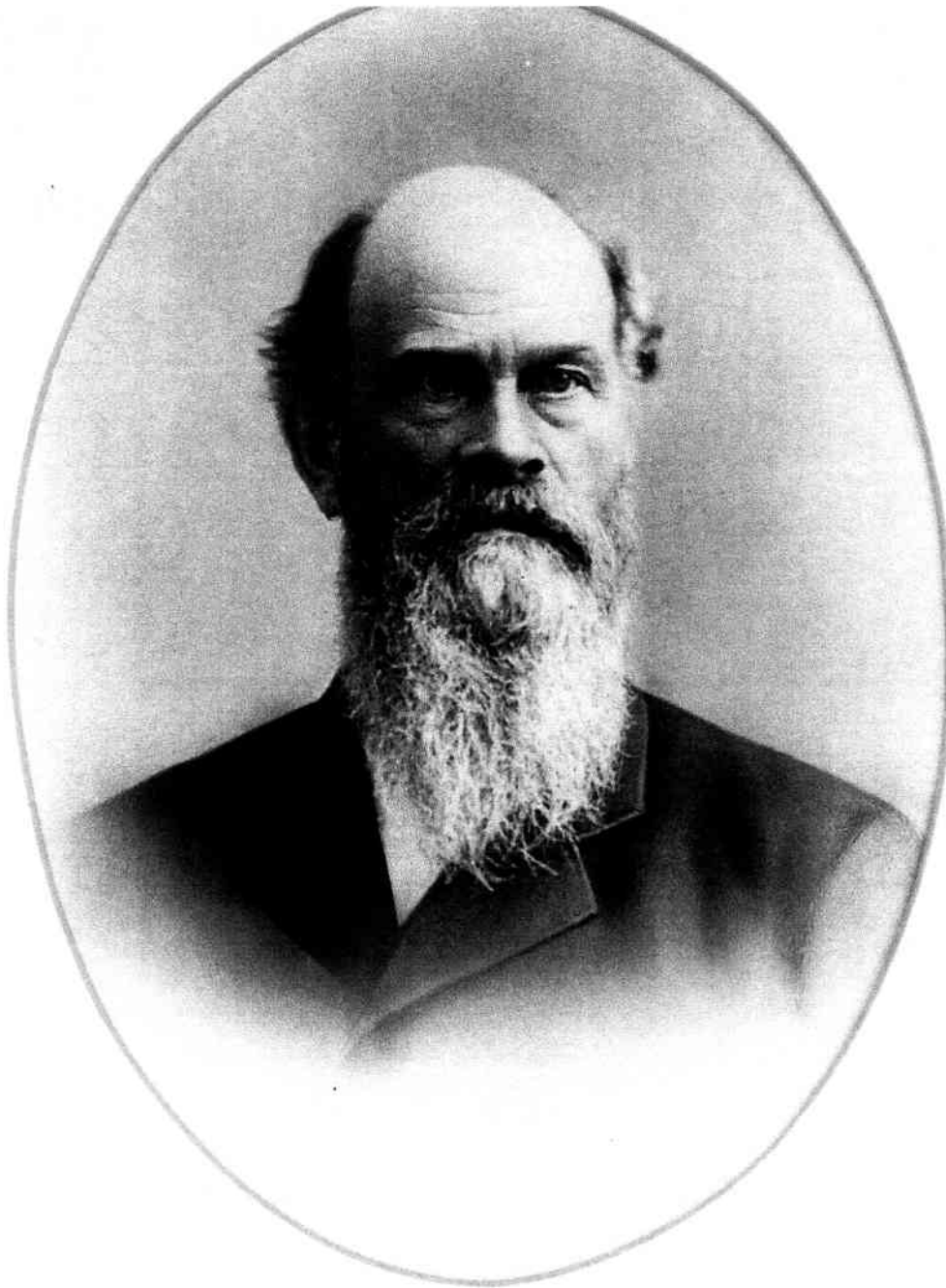
him the next day and the price had gone up to \$20. I told him that because of the increase in price I could not give him an answer until I called a meeting with my partner. Buying a hearse is indeed a Grave Deal. I wandered over to the Kidder Garage, next door to my office. Bill was out front scanning up and down the street for a gasoline customer. I caught his attention long enough for him to agree to chip in his \$10, and that is how we became owners of the Wilmot Town Hearse for \$20.

Now there is a sequel to this story but first I want to go into some earlier history. Mary Petersen writes of the hearse agent, Seth Goodhue. He was my grandfather and I derived my *moniker* from him. Fred Goodhue, his son and the next hearse agent, was my uncle. For years the Hearse House stood adjacent to the Goodhue home. Harland Goodhue, Fred's son, and my brother Don, cousins and playmates used the hearse as a favorite hiding place when they played hide and seek. Don, now nearing 80, tells me that as a boy he had a ride in the vehicle.

Getting back to Bill's and my \$20 purchase: At the time I owned some property in Wilmot. Along with the

privilege of paying taxes I yearly received a Town Report. The year after we bought the hearse there was an entry in the report, under Receipts which read, "Sale of Town Hearse — \$5." So, Dear Editor — it would appear that Washington isn't the only town beginning with W that has had its Watergate.

Sincerely Yours  
Seth A. Lamson



Seth Goodhue

B. Dunbarton, NH 1827, D. Wilmot, NH 1911

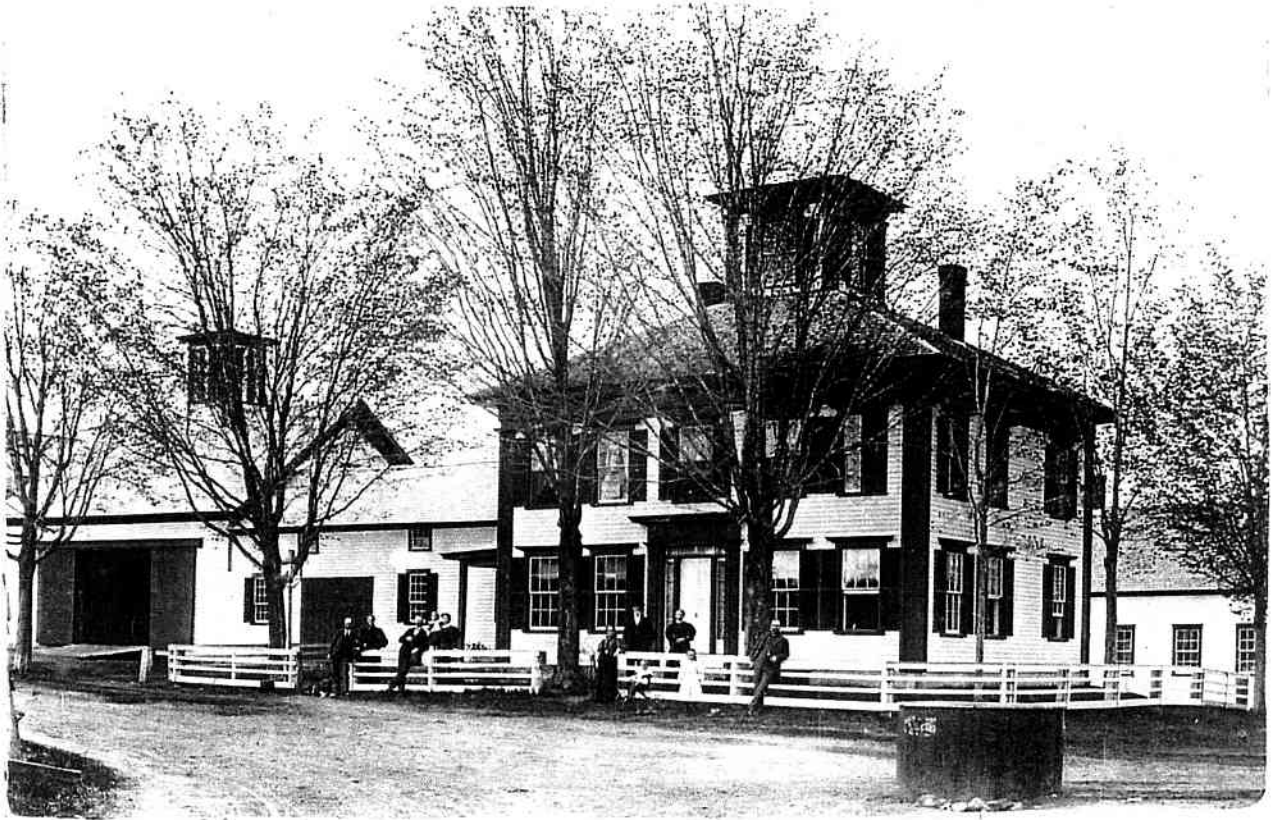
Debra's great grandfather

He came to Wilmot at the age of 11 with his family, a 3 day trip.

Married, Susan Stearn daughter of Josiah Stearns, one of his 22 children.

Seth was an inventor, farmer, cabinet maker and carpenter. He was a homeopath and when his skills with herbs and potions failed to work, he made very fine caskets and undertook to bury his neighbors.

In 1906 He wrote to his brother, Dr. David Goodhue who lived in Springfield, "One thing is sure that time moves very fast and soon our work will be done. Wilmot can boast of having the undertaker who has been in business longer than any man in New England, as excerpt by Boston papers. I have sold goods enough to bury every man, woman and child in Wilmot, New London and part of Springfield. It seems impossible but my books will prove it. Death is doing his work and if there is nothing better for man than he has in this life the whole work of the almighty has been a failure from beginning to end and the devil has shown himself to be the master workman in worldly affairs."



**Wilmot, New Hampshire Home of  
Seth & Susan (Stearns) Goodhue  
Located at the corner of Bunker Hill Road and Route 4A  
(The home and barns burned in 1938.**

**Seth's Cabinet Shop pictured, right rear, of the home survived, and has  
since been moved to the house site.)**

**Identifications made by Debra (Lamson) Perkins' father,  
Seth A. Lamson.**

**From l. to r. Uncle Seth Goodhue, Aunt Florence (Langley) Goodhue,  
their dog "Rover", my parents and brother...Dr. Charles A. Lamson,  
Mary Abby (Goodhue) Lamson & Donald Charles, Lamson,  
Grandparents, Seth and Susan Sawyer (Stearns) Goodhue, Aunt Josyline  
(Spaulding) Goodhue, Harland Lloyd Goodhue, Edith Marion Good hue  
(Campbell), Uncle Fred Goodhue.**



## New London



For The Monitor

This antique horse-drawn hearse, found and restored by Bill Kidder and Bud Lauridsen, stands before the Historical Society's hearse house.

## *Lovingly restored, an old-fashioned hearse lives again*

For The Monitor

The town hearse was as important to New Hampshire communities in the 1800's as our town trucks and fire equipment are to us today. The New London Historical Society has an old hearse which has been authentically restored and is housed in its own building.

William Kidder Sr. and Laurids "Bud" Lauridsen will tell the story of the acquisition and restoration of the hearse and the building of the hearse house at the next Historical Society dessert social Jan. 21, in the Meeting House on the New London Historical Society grounds. The evening will begin with dessert at 7 p.m.

Shortly after they returned home following World War II, Bill Kidder and Seth Lamson went to a dance at the Town Hall in Wilmot and spotted a dilapidated hearse in a barn out back. They bought it on a whim and stored it in Bill Kidder's buildings. Eventually they gave the hearse to the Historical Society and it was stored there in the Phillips Barn for many years.

The town of Wilmot had purchased the hearse in 1886 for \$600, hired Seth Goodhue (Seth Lamson's grandfather) as the hearse agent and undertaker and often rented the horse-drawn vehicle to area towns for a small fee. It was probably last used in 1932.

On a trip to Fremont to check out the Old Fremont Meeting House Lauridsen

and Kidder saw an old hearse house next door with a hearse similar to Wilmot's, built by the same maker, and they agreed that someday the New London Historical Society should have its own hearse house.

After Harriett "Petey" Kidder died, the hearse house, a replica of the one in Fremont, was built as a memorial and the old hearse was restored. It was quite an undertaking. In Kidder's words, "Many hours and days were spent in the winter months scraping paint, hunting for parts, carpenter work, sandblasting, cleaning the interior, finding new fringe and tassels, trips to Jaffrey for a new pole, neatsfoot oil, whip and lamps."

The two men credited many local people for assistance in providing knowledge and skill for the project. The hearse house was completed according to Lauridsen's plan and built as authentically as possible, even using a band-saw to duplicate eighteenth-century sawing procedures.

The hearse and hearse house were dedicated in a ceremony in July of 1995. A plain pine casket inside is covered with a flag with 42 stars, correct for the time when Wilmot purchased the hearse in 1884.

The hearse house is the 11th building in the Historical Society's restored village.

**HEIDEN BECKWITH**  
New London Historical Society

## WILMOT TOWN HEARSE

1879-"Coffins and Caskets in Good Variety at Seth Goodhues' Wilmot Center"

The above appeared in the Kearsarge Sentinel, October 4, 1879.

1883-Bequest made by Calvin Fisk to Wilmot for purchase of hearse.

1886-Wilmot purchased hearse for \$600. Seth Goodhue was hearse agent and undertaker for Wilmot, later these duties passed to his son Fred Goodhue. Many towns called upon Wilmot for loan of the hearse for a small fee, largest of which was \$25.

1891-Records show hearse was varnished.

1896-Hearse was painted.

1906-Painted again.

1906-A passage from a letter written by Seth Goodhue to his brother, Dr. David Goodhue of Springfield, N.H. dated February 21, 1906 is as follows:

"Wilmot can boast of having the undertaker who has been in business longer than any man in New England as excerpted by Boston papers. I have sold goods enough to bury every man, woman, and child in Wilmot, New London, and a part of Springfield. It seems impossible but my books will prove it. Death is doing his work and if there is nothing better for man than he has in this life, the whole work of the Almighty has been a failure from beginning to end, and the Devil has shown himself to be the master workman in worldly affairs."

1915-Hearse painted once more.

1932-Probable date last used.

1947-Purchased from Town of Wilmot by William F. Kidder and Seth A. Lamson, grandson of Seth Goodhue. Hearse later given by them to the New London Historical Society.

1976-Sponsored by Mrs. George Gleason, owner of Old Goodhue Mortuary which was built about 1850.

# Wilmot Historical Society

Invites everyone interested in local history  
to hear about and see illustrations of

## "THE RECYCLED HEARSE"

Being an account, in words, pictures,  
and artifacts, of the restoration  
of the Wilmot hearse

Featuring:

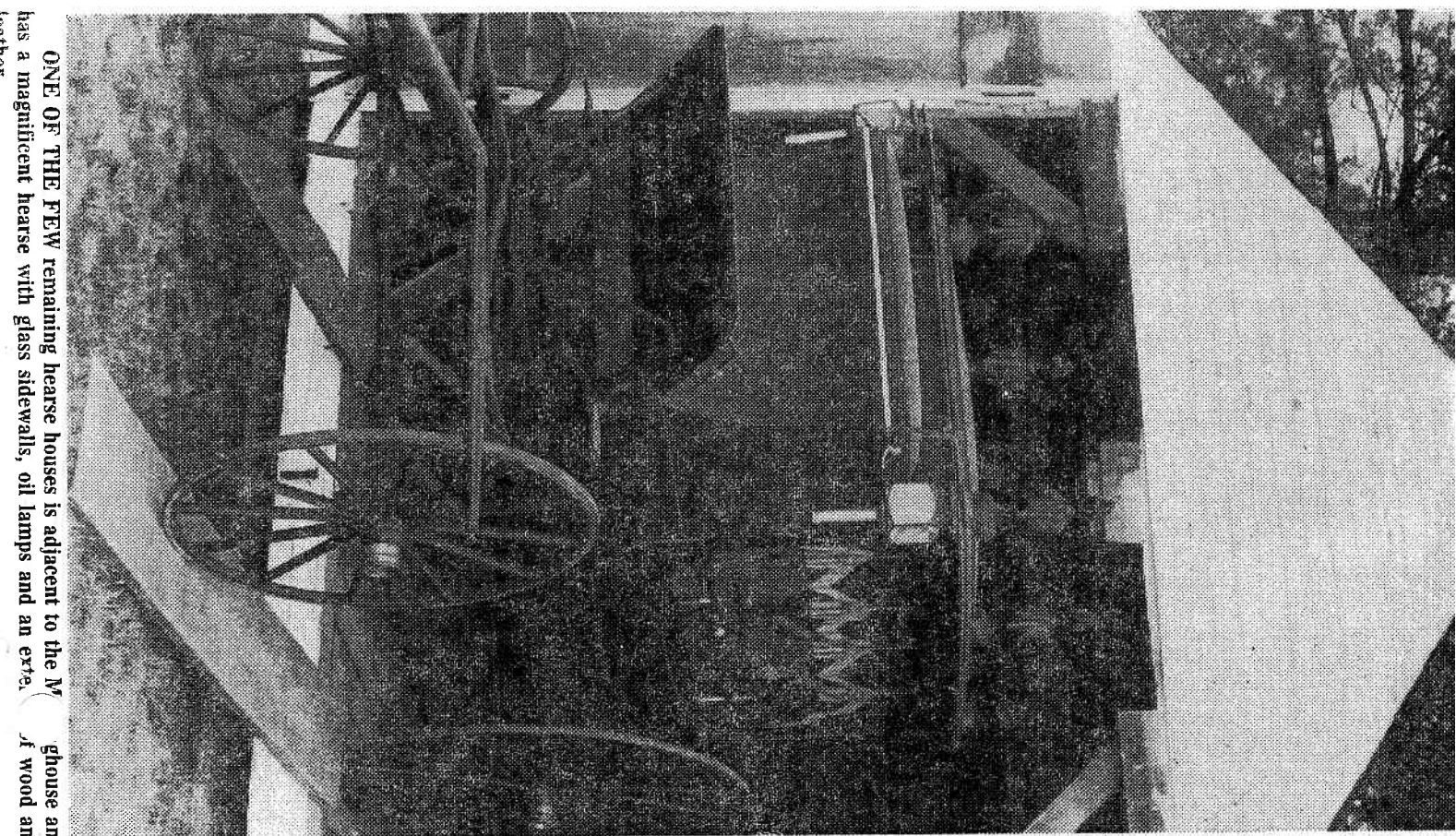
Bill Kidder, Sr. & Bud Lauridsen

**Sunday, February 4, 1996, at 2**

**p.m.**

[Heavy Snow Date - February 11, 1996]

at the Wilmot Town Hall



ONE OF THE FEW remaining hearse houses is adjacent to the Wilmot Town Hall. The hearse house has a magnificent hearse with glass side walls, oil lamps and an extra wheel.

## AND THUS IT CAME TO BE

Petey and I were on a trip to Fremont, NH with Ade and Larry Lauridsen to look into the possibility of restoring our Concord Coach and to discuss it with Mark Williams, a dedicated professional conservator.

A side trip was to visit the Fremont Meeting House - one of the oldest unrestored Meeting Houses in New Hampshire. Adjacent to the Meeting House was their Hearse House, but we could not get in - no windows and the doors were locked with an old-time padlock.

It fascinated us and we determined to return to see if there might be a hearse inside similar to the one at the New London Historical Society. We contacted the local historian, Sandy Thomas, who said there was indeed a hearse inside, but no one had a key to the padlock, but he would get it opened for us if he had to break the lock - and he did!

The hearse, in excellent shape, is similar to the one we have and made by the same maker, George Brownell, New Bedford, MA. We took several photos of it and also the Fremont Historian.

Larry recognized a bier in the rafters which had not been known to the Historian, who was elated to know of this possession.

On the way home, we discussed the possibility of restoring our hearse (Wilmot's) and that some day we could have a hearse house to store it in on the Society grounds. It would be a copy of Fremont's which was built in the late 1700's.

Little did we realize the events that were to follow -

After Petey died, Larry and I decided to do a restoration of the hearse and early in January it arrived at the Ice House on Pleasant Street and work was started. It was in very bad condition - glass broken, rusted undergear, lamps missing, rear overhang broken off. The two-

horse pole was missing, paint real bad, only part of the finish left. Driver's side handle was missing, etc., etc. - a real challenge.

Many hours and days were spent in the winter months scraping paint, hunting for parts, carpenter work, sandblasting, cleaning the interior, finding new fringe and tassels, trips to Jaffrey for a new pole, neatsfoot oil, whip, and lamps.

Many hands were involved and we thank them for their interest and skills.

Bob Lull; Jim Bewley; Jim Drewniak, he reproduced the handle missing on the driver's side; Ray Chadwick, now deceased, for turning out the finials; Jim Green for a great job of carving them; Leo Gareau for carpenter work and assisting our artist painter, Larry Lauridsen, who scraped and painted the upper structure; and Pete Lauridsen for a beautiful undercoating of primer and final finish of the complete undercarriage; Robert Seabolt, Sunapee Glass Works, for all glass replacements; David Harris for finial work; New London Upholstery for all interior work; and Betty Phillips for harnesses and harness hooks.

Finally completed May 25, 1995, it was moved to its new home! While all this was going on, the Historical Society Board decided to use funds given in Petey's memory to build a hearse house. Once again, the work and skills involved were beyond imagination. All of the lumber, cut to specification and delivered to the Phillips Barn, was donated by Durgin and Crowell Lumber Co. They even used a band saw to duplicate the eighteenth century sawing procedure. The frame was assembled in the Phillips barn by Leo Gareau and Larry Lauridsen during the bad weather in order to have it ready for warm spring days.

As near as possible, it is a replica of the one in Fremont.

Bill Roos and Larry Lauridsen did much of the foundation work, erection and shingling.

Bob Nelson and Bill Roos did the underground wiring and lamp installation.

David Seybold and a crew did a great paint job, and Glen Irick landscaped and guaranteed a green lawn by the annual meeting in July! You may have noticed the biers on the cross beams above the hearse. The white one was for children. We had a report that Harrison Hunt had found them while cleaning the Pine Hill Cemetery tool and storage building. Harrison had taken them to Loretta Rayno, a member of the Cemetery Committee. She came up to see our progress on the Wilmot Hearse and agreed that the biers should be with the hearse. At the next meeting of the Wilmot Cemetery Committee, it was voted to have them returned to the hearse. We are most appreciative of their gift. The plain pine casket with rope handles, made in Concord, NH, was given by Walton Chadwick.

The flag on the top has forty-two stars, appropriate for the number of states in 1884 when the hearse was purchased by the Town of Wilmot. The whole project has been a fine example of dedication to the New London Historical Society.

The past must not and will not be forgotten as we strive to make New London a better place in which to live - now and in the future.

Bill Kidder  
Hearse House Dedication  
Sunday, July 30, 1995



# Kidder, Lauridsen Will Tell Story of 'Old Wilmot Hearse' During New London Historical Society 'Dessert Social,' Jan. 21

**NEW LONDON** - The town hearse was as important to New Hampshire residents in the 1800s as town trucks and firefighting equipment are today. The New London Historical Society has an old hearse which has been authentically restored and is housed in its own building.

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On a trip to Fremont to check out the old Fremont Meeting House, Lauridsen and Kidder saw an old Hearse House next door with a hearse similar to the old Wilmot hearse and built by the same maker, and they agreed that



**IN ORDER TO RESTORE THE OLD WILMOT HEARSE**, Bill Kidder, left, and Bud Lauridsen visited many New England towns to view similar vehicles and acquire authentic parts. Here, in a photo taken in the Fall of 1995, they hold *finals*, the carved, wooden, decorative ornaments which can be seen

atop the restored hearse in the photo below. There are six such crowning objects on the hearse, three on each side. Many towns in the area purchased hearses from the same builder, and each has a serial number, Lauridsen said. The Old Wilmot Hearse is Serial No. 2929.



someday the New London Historical Society should have its own hearse house.

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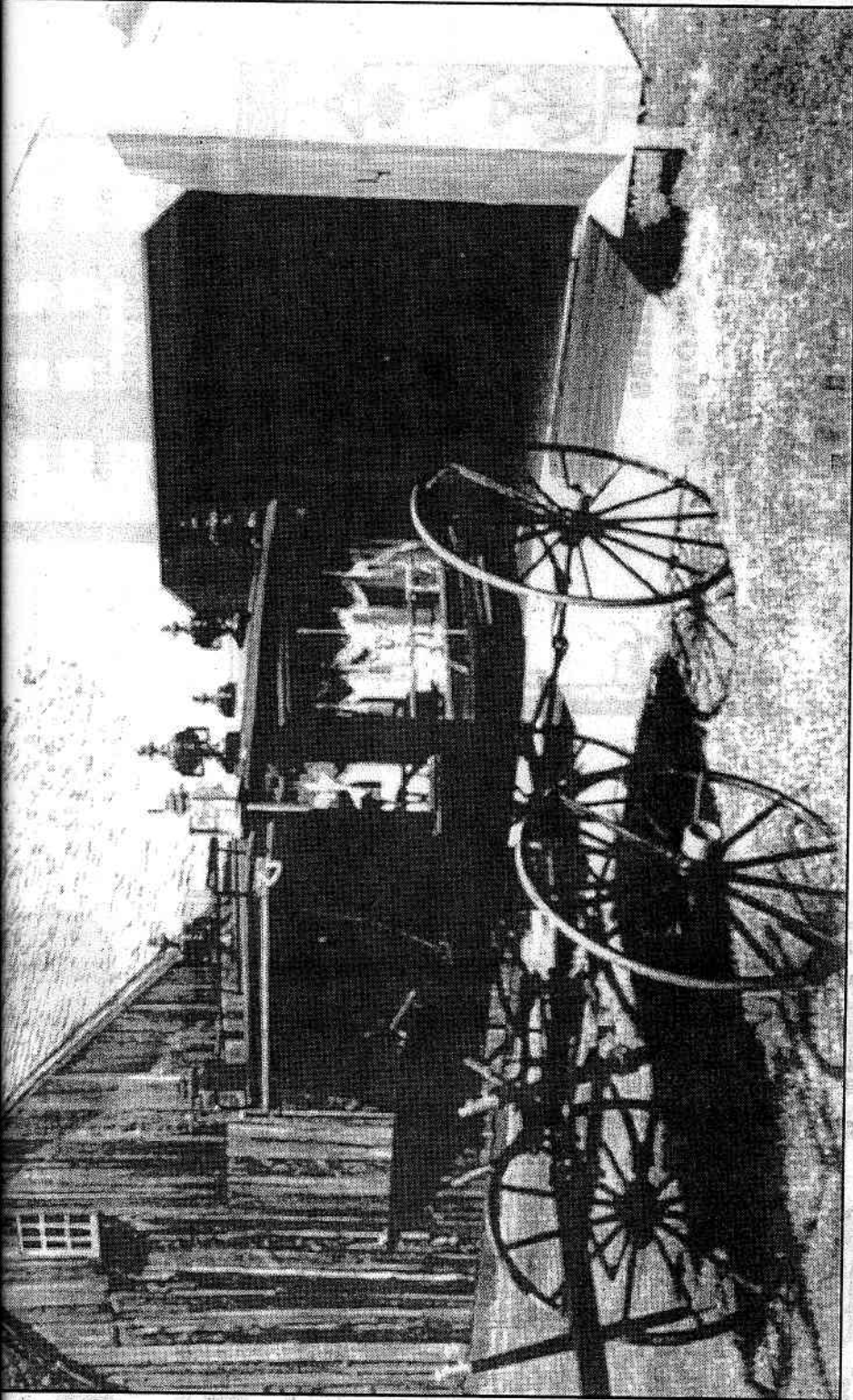
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The hearse and Hearse House were dedicated in July of 1995. The plain pine casket is covered with a flag with 42 stars, correct for the time it was purchased by the Town of Wilnot.

The Hearse House is the eleventh building in the Historical Society's restored village.



**Photos Courtesy  
New London Historical Society**