

Mary Mills Deyette

Mary Mills Deyette is a name that both frightened and inspired a couple of generations of Shelburne students.

An 1885 graduate of the University of Vermont, she taught mathematics at Burlington High School for many years, prior to which she had been principal at the Stambaugh, Michigan high school, vice-principal at Schleigh Academy in Philadelphia, a faculty member at Woodside Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, the preceptress at the high school in Little Falls, New York, head of her own Deyette Private School in Shelburne as well as principal of Shelburne High School, first in the 1890s and again from 1928-1930.

She was a learned woman, versed in the classics, a teacher of literature, history, Latin, French, and German in addition to mathematics. She was a good businesswoman who built up considerable real estate holdings.

Mrs. Deyette was also a woman of firsts. She was the first woman in Shelburne to ride a bicycle, the first woman to own and operate an automobile, the first to own a radio, and on her trip around the world, the first to fly over the Grand Canyon. She was also a woman of firm and outspoken opinion.

Despite all her ability and accomplishments there was one forum not available to her or any other woman until 1918. For the first 131 years of Shelburne Town Meeting they had no voice. This changed only when the right to vote was finally extended to women.

It is our intent this evening to visit some town meetings past in order to see what was then important to Shelburne voters. Although chartered in 1763 with some early settlement in the late 1760s, the town was not organized until the first town meeting in 1787. At that time there were about thirty settled families. According to Shelburne historian Lyman Thayer, writing in the 1860s, "From this period arrivals of others as settlers were numerous. The forests began to disappear; cultivated fields were to be seen in almost every part of the township; highways were laid out and opened; bridges erected across streams; framed and brick houses began to take the place of log cabins,--rail and log fence that of the brush fence which enclosed the clearings originally. Societies social and religious, were formed; political feelings were manifested and civilization was apparent in the habits, manners and customs of the people. Schools were established and well patronized. A house for religious worship was erected, and prosperity generally crowned the labors and efforts of the residents." At the time of the census in 1791 the population was established at 389. By 1840 it would increase to 1089 where it would remain fairly constant until after the Second World War.

Town meetings initially took place in private dwellings until 1797 when it was voted that "town meeting should be held at Capt. Harrington's for the future." Captain Harrington's was the present-day Shelburne Inn, built in 1796. Not until 1808 was construction of the first meeting house completed and the warning for the 1809 town meeting sets it as the meeting place. However, upon convening, the voters adjourned to Capt. Harrington's anyway. Perhaps the absence of any heat source in the meeting house had a direct bearing on this move. Subsequent meetings returned to the town meeting house.

The minutes of the first town meeting in 1787 record only the town offices and by whom they were held. Fifteen men filled thirteen different town positions, including Moses Pierson who held five. Early town offices long out of existence include Leather Sealer, responsible for the inspecting and stamping of hides as good; the Sealer of Weights and Measures who examined, tested, and stamped weights and measures according to the standards of the state; Sexton or gravedigger; Coffin Maker; and Surveyor of Highways, responsible for ascertaining the conditions of town roads.

Although these are of interest in themselves, other recorded information is scant for the first decade of town meeting.

As the effects of increasing settlement described by Lyman Thayer were felt, we begin to see their reflections in the town meeting minutes. The construction, maintenance, and discontinuance of roads and bridges becomes the major topic, one that has continued into the present day. The protection of property rights becomes

increasingly at issue as evident in the intervention of fence viewers in settling boundary and fence disputes as well as the often debated subject of livestock running free throughout the town.

Nevertheless, the minutes provided of town meetings past are skeletal at best. We are given the issues voted upon but we have no record of the personalities involved, what was said by whom, or how passionately the issues were felt. For that we must all use our imaginations which is your charge for this evening.

THE CIVIL WAR

In April of 1861 a special town meeting was called "in regard to responding to the late requisition of the President of the United States upon the governor of this state for men to defend the rights and honor of our country." Lincoln had issued a call of 75,000 men and the quota for Vermont was one regiment of infantry totalling 780 men. As a war of three months duration was expected, the town voted on the recommendation of an appointed committee to provide \$1,000. "to be used in the following manner, thirty dollars to be paid each volunteer, and such further sum as the committee shall see fit, to each person who shall volunteer into service of the State or United States..."

The first regiment was mustered into service May 8. The state legislature had met for a three-day extra session on April 25. It appropriated \$1,000,000. for the nation's defense and provided for six full regiments armed and equipped for a period of two years. According to Conant's Vermont, "Money for the equipment of volunteers and for the support of their families was pledged by individuals and corporations; and the representatives of the towns were instructed to make liberal appropriations of money and to provide for men to carry on the war." In such a manner William Harmon was to provide for fifteen men from Shelburne for which he would be reimbursed.

In 1862 Vermont mustered nine more regiments, none in 1863 and the seventeenth in May of 1864. Shelburne's next special meeting was in December of 1863 when the voters met "to see whether the Town will vote bounties to supply the quota of the Town under the recent call of the President of the United States for three hundred thousand men to serve in the Regiments and Companies now in the field and if so what bounties." It was voted to pay a bounty of \$350.00 to each recruit or volunteer credited to the town for which the Selectmen were authorized to borrow \$5500.00 on credit of the Town. In the years 1861 and 1862 the Town had voted a tax of 10 cents on the dollar of the grand list to cover the years expenses. This \$5500.00 note represented 130 cents on the dollar on the grand list.

The following March (1864) the town again met at a special meeting to vote bounties to supply the call of the President for an additional two hundred thousand men. An additional 10 cent tax was voted for the bounties and it was "Resolved that the selectmen be authorized to pay such sum as in their judgement they deem best to each soldier who may enlist for the town to fill any future call." What they deemed best was clarified in July of 1864 when it was voted that the town pay each "volunteer, substitute, or drafted man who is credited to the Town of Shelburne one hundred dollars for one year, two hundred dollars for two years and three hundred dollars for three years.

It was an accepted practice to pay a commutation fee by which a volunteer could serve in one's stead. Nearly 2,000 Vermont men availed themselves of this opportunity, Shelburnites no exception to the rule. Not until 1864 was it required that every man who passed examination serve in the army. This drove up the price of providing a substitute. According to W.W. Higbee, Charlotte chronicler, "\$1000.00 paid for substitutes was the familiar legend at more than one enlisting station." Owing to an obvious difficulty in filling the quota, in August of 1864 the town agreed to an additional tax on the grand list in order to pay "each man liable to draft who shall furnish a substitute of volunteer for three years \$600.00 until said quota is filled." In fairness to those who had already volunteered or furnished substitutes for the earlier calls, the \$600.00 was made retro-active. The money was raised on the credit of the town and the following March a tax of 150 cents on the dollar of the grand list was voted "to defray the indebtedness of the town." This brought the total to \$3.00 on the dollar or 30 times that which covered the expenses of the town in prior years.

The warning for the March 1866 town meeting includes an article to see if the town will pay four men \$300.00 each for furnishing substitutes. This article was dismissed by vote at town meeting, the voters electing not to pay them as their names do not appear on the list of those who received bounties. Even without this \$1,200.00 savings, the cost of the Civil War was staggering. The total expenses of the Town of Shelburne for the years 1861 through 1866 were \$23,029.95. Of these \$17,178.66 were war expenses. Of that figure \$16,110.00 were paid as bounties to a total of 39 men, ranging from \$60.00 to \$750.00.

According to Higbee, "Money was plenty during the Civil War years. Taxes were high and so was everything else. Cows sold from \$75 to \$100.00 each, butter 50 cents a pound, wool 90 cents to a dollar a pound, three pounds of granulated sugar for a dollar." However, the relative prosperity of the war years faded leaving only the debts.

Never again would individual towns shoulder the military needs of the country so directly. The First World War is not mentioned in the minutes of the town meeting. The Second World War is referred to only by way of the Red Cross as a worthy cause in 1943 and by a talk on the subject of democracy in 1945. One cannot help but reflect on what effect such grass roots involvement in the procurement and financing of an army would have on military issues today.

Contrary to the concept of separation of Church and State that we consider to be one of the bases for the American system, the Town was directly involved with how religion was practiced.

Tithing-Men appear as elected town officers from 1787 through 1848. According to Webster's Dictionary of 1840 a tithing-man was a "parish officer annually elected to preserve good order in the church during divine service, and to make complaint of any disorderly conduct."

In June of 1791 it was voted "to hire a preacher of the Gospel for a few Sabbaths." In December of that year it was voted "to hire a Preacher for the year insuing. Voted said preacher be of the Baptist Denomination."

Although it had been voted at the 1791 Town Meeting "to agree on a place for a house of Publick Worship," no further progress was made until April 1807 when the townspeople "voted to appoint a committee to stick the stake for a meeting house. Committee appointed and reported that they had agreed and stuck a stake and stones around it on the first rise of ground so called south of Benjamin Harrington's (location of the present-day Village School) and that stake and stones to be the northwest corner of sd. Meeting House..."

A "motion to try the minds of the Inhabitants to see if they will agree to raise money to build the aforesaid house by tax" was unanimously defeated. It was then voted to circulate a subscription paper and to see whether the money could be raised in that manner.

It was voted "to adopt the plan which Capt. Benjamin Harrington procured...for said House." Upon completion of the meeting house in 1808 the subscribers met the expenses of Capt. Harrington through the purchase of shares. Each shareholder could then determine the denomination of his interest. Initially the Congregationalists held the largest percentage.

In 1812 it was voted "to appoint a committee to make a distribution of the public money arising from the minister lands among the different societies of said town." Minister lands were those set aside for the use of the first settled clergyman by the original land grants. The money generated was from leasing these lands. It should be noted that although the town government would be involved through a committee elected yearly to "divide the public money and to hire preaching" until 1863, it at least did so in an ecumenical manner. The Congregationalists while popular, the Methodists, and the Episcopalians all shared in the distribution of this income. Such was not always the practice in other towns. When the new town house was completed in 1867 (to replace the White Meeting House which had burned) it was voted that it be "open to all denominations for religious services

under the supervision of the Selectmen."

This arrangement might have been different. In 1819 the Congregationalists moved to hire a permanent resident minister and thus to claim the minister lands. The income from this land would then have been used solely for the support of their society. Townspeople objected to move. The Episcopalians succeeded in securing Joel Clapp as the first wettled minister as well as his agreement not to claim the lands, insuring that the income would continue to be shared by all denominations.

The sale of alcohol in Shelburne continued to be an issue as late as 1933-1936 when after the repeal of federal prohibition yearly balloting was done. Each time the sale was favored by a sizable margin.

Although the issue of alcohol comes as no surprise, the attempt to set the highest of moral tones in Shelburne in the late 1840s brought the demise of bowling as well. The bowling alley in question was located in the village in a dormitory of the Rutland Railroad, later moved to its present site at the Shelburne Craft School. It was closed by order of two of the three selectmen and it seems to be more than coincidence that one of them was also secretary of the temperance society.

The Livestock Issue

Much of Shelburne's earliest town meetings dealt with the issue of livestock. In 1787 appears the first record of ear-marks for the identification of the animals' owners. These consisted of a cross, a slit, two slits, a hole, or a half-penny in the right or left ear. By 1790 a combination of these marks was employed, one such example being that of Capt. Samuel Clark which consisted of a slit in the end of the left ear and a half-penny the underside of the right.

These marks were of importance due to the lack of fencing and an apparently mobile livestock population. From 1795 the resulting nuisance was a recurring source for the attention of Shelburne's voters commencing in that year with a duly passed motion "that sheep shall not run at large." In 1796 it was voted that forfeited rams should go into the town treasury. In 1799 it was voted "that swine be not free commoners" and that "sheep be not free commoners" but that horses be free commoners but "damage feasant provided they break into inclosure." It was also passed that "rams running at large except with their owners between the 1st of September and the 1st of November shall be castrated or corded (bound or fastened with cords). The following year boars were also made subject to castration if running at large between April 15th and December 1st. Variations of these ordinances were voted and revoted upon over the next fifteen years, a solid indication of the state of hedgerows, absence of adequate fencing (barbed wire was not invented until 1873), and the inability of many to comply.

We can assume that the problem abated somewhat in the thirty-year period ending in 1847 but not altogether. In that year a group of residents submitted the following to the selectmen: "We the undersigned legal voters and residents of the village of Shelburne respectfully request your Honours to set out our village in order that we may have protection against cattle and other animals from being at large in our streets to the injury of said residents of the village and also in order to preserve our rights according to the law." In response the selectmen set the village boundaries as the main road south from the LaPlatte River, then southerly on the Falls Road to the southeast corner of the cemetery and westerly from that point "containing twenty dwelling houses, three houses of religious worship, one store and Oregon Hall."

They dealt with the rest of the town in 1850 when it was voted "that all persons shall be prohibited from using the highways as pastures, except those who own two acres or less, or no real estate which last shall have the privilege of pasturing one cow in the highways. We also request the haywards to see that this is carried out. (According to Webster's Dictionary of 1840, a hayward was a person formerly appointed to guard the hedges and hence to

keep cattle from doing their injury. In New England, the hayward is a town officer whose duty is to impound cattle and particularly swine which are found running at large in the highways contrary to law.)

In 1854 it was voted yet again that "all animals be prohibited from running at large in the highway and on the commons in the Town of Shelburne and that on such running at large by such animals the owners thereof shall be chargeable in a penalty of ten dollars. The above motion is amended so as to exempt a single cow of a poor working man from the above penalty from the 1st day of May to the 1st day of November of any year, provided that such cow shall be confined by her owner in some suitable yard or stable during the nighttime for such season.

The livestock issue is perhaps better understood when we know actual population figures from Thompson's Vermont of 1842.

People	1089
Horses	304
Swine	999
Cattle	1376
Sheep	17636

A final note on horses: It was voted in 1876 that hitching posts be provided around the green and on the main street. However, the threat of any animals running at large would soon enough be replaced by the threat of the automobile.

Shelburne town meeting records reveal in addition to the religious interests, some moral legislation by its citizens. In 1839 and 1840, it was first "voted to recommend to the authority of said town not to nominate any person as Inn Keeper for the purpose of selling spirituous liquors." In 1852 " a license was granted to John Simonds 2d to sell for one year Foreign and domestic spirits for mechanical, medicinal, and chemical purposes, and that only." This same year Shelburne voted almost unanimously in favor of a state referendum for prohibition. It did not pass.

The tenor of the period is best understood through the writings of town historican Lyman Thayer in .

equality that can take place among men will be found among the inhabitants of a new country—their employments and pursuits being the same, and all depending on their own labor and industry for support. The early settlers were not noted for their piety or religious attainments. Their habits and customs were not of a religious character. They were in the habit of using spirituous liquors rather freely, as was the custom in all other places in those days. They must be had in preference to anything else; were necessary on all occasions and under all circumstances, and were an antidote for all the ills of life and a remedy for every disease. From 1805 to 1815, there was probably more liquor used in Shelburne, and throughout the state, than at any other period of the same number of years before or since. Previous to that time the population was not so great and the facilities for obtaining it were not so good; and from about 1815 there began to be some temperance advocates, and they have been increasing in numbers and influence from that day. In those days there were some 200 distilleries in the state of Vermont. There were 30 of them in the county of Chittenden, and four of them in the town of Shelburne; and they were all in full operation. There were perhaps from 20 to 25 hogsheads of liquor sold annually at the stores in Shelburne. There was one tavern at the village and four others on the road to Burlington, which made five rum-selling and dram-drinking establishments in so many miles. I have known even ministers of the Gospel who made no secret of taking a glass of grog before entering the pulpit to preach, declaring that it assisted them to preach; and many of their hearers carried their flasks of cider brandy in their pockets to church, and they were freely and fearlessly passed around at intermission with the understanding that if it assisted the minister to preach, it also assisted them to hear and understand. There were no temperance organizations previous to 1830. In that year a temperance society was organized. Col. Horace Saxton was appointed president; George Cloyse, vice-president; and Asahel Nash, secretary. A constitution was drawn up and subscribed to by 156 residents of the town, headed by Rev. Louis McDonald, an Episcopal clergyman. This organization for many years was the means of effecting a very

desirable change in the morals and habits of the people in the community. This society held their stated meetings for 23 years, but has been suspended by other temperance organizations. There was an organization of the order of Rechabites in 1847; and this was resolved into an organization of Sons of Temperance known as the Oaken Bucket Division No. 75 in Shelburne. This order has a convenient hall for their weekly division meetings, which have been and still are regularly attended and now number some 100 members.

In reviewing the past, we can but be satisfied that the friends of the temperance cause have not been laboring in vain; great and important changes have been wrought. The morals and customs of society have been greatly improved. Distilleries—once so numerous, manufacturing and dealing out destruction morally and physically—have all been demolished, and the places they occupied have become fruitful fields. Public houses, where once was heard the clamor of the drunkard and the revel of the debauchee, have been converted into quiet farm-houses. Those signs which were so numerous and so conspicuous in all our public thoroughfares—not emblems of peace, but of intemperance and immoralities—have disappeared. Intoxicating liquors, which were once the leading article of trade in all our country stores, are no part of their trade at the present day. In private families they have been entirely banished from their sideboards, and are wholly out of use as a beverage to be presented to friends on social occasions. At public gatherings, where once it was used as freely as water, and drunkenness and brawls and fightings and fatal accidents were among the results, no man now dare offer the maddening poison openly; and consequently general temperance, peace and security are the order of the day. In farming and other laborious employments very little is used at the present day where once it was very common. Let us therefore give no heed to the false outcry that no good has been done, but thank God and take courage. The enactment of the prohibitory law of our state in 1852 was to become a law provided a majority of the people sanctioned that enactment; and the votes of Shelburne were almost unanimous in favor of its becoming a law of the state; only three votes being cast against

As early as 1790, the town took an active role in providing care for those in need. In that year "After some debate respecting a cow delivered to Mr. Amasa Darwin by the Selectmen for his keeping a child of William Simpson, the child since being dead, it was voted that the town make a present of said cow to the said Mr. Darwin and that Wm. Simpson pay six shillings per week to the town for nursing his child whilst at Mr. Amasa Darwin's."

This arrangement no doubt satisfied the payment of the town and that of Mr. Darwin but can hardly be looked on as charity since Mr. Simpson had to reimburse the town for the care of his deceased child. This is however a good example of how the Selectmen and later the Overseers of the Poor worked with the townspeople to provide help where needed.

In 1799 the first committee "to make a settlement with the Overseers of the Poor" is voted. This indicates that the overseer was already in existence and was active enough that a committee other than the Selectmen was responsible of reviewing his accounts. Although detailed accounts of the overseer do not appear in the minutes of town meeting until the 1890s, it seems safe to assume that the assistance provided at an earlier date would have been of a similar nature.

The moderator would now like to call on Mr. George Roberts for his report as Overseer of the Poor for 1898-1899. Mr. Roberts:

"Well, the first item is payment to Annie Lessor for taking care of her nephews. I think we all know that they aren't orphans in a legal sense but someone's had to look after them until the home situation improved. One hundred and fifty-six dollars. Part of the second order on that includes paying Berneice Lessor for feeding tramps. She felt four dollars and fifty cents would be fair.

"Third item is for keeping Ned McNally and then getting him over to the State Hospital at Waterbury. I don't imagine that there's anyone here I have to explain that to. Twenty-four dollars and fifty cents.

"We had a casket made for Mrs. Burbo's child and then one for the little Mack girl. Both of those, very sad cases indeed. Four dollars each.

"Item Six is paying Dr. Stoddard thirty dollars and seventy-five cents. Most of that was for looking after the Mack girl.

"Item seven is paying Gird Smith for keeping Frank Smith. I know seventy-eight dollars seems high but believe me he can't do much for himself since that spell.

"Then we have some miscellaneous merchandise from Roberts and Deyette. Twenty-seven dollars and five cents. That included some meat for Mrs. Rich and her family.

"Item nine is George Blair taking care of Mrs. Daly until her niece from Fair Haven came and took her. The last item is the fifteen dollars for my time over the last year."

"This brings the grand total to three hundred, forty-eight dollars and eighty cents."

The moderator would like to thank Mr. Roberts for his report

While the duties of the Overseer of the Poor seem to have been directed toward resolving one-time and short-term needs in a direct and practical manner, the problems posed by the chronically indigent were addressed by the Poor Farm.

The Town of Shelburne entered into an association with the towns of Williston and Essex in 1859 to purchase a farm for the support of the poor. The Union Poor Farm Association bought a property of 202.5 acres on the Onion (Winooski) River in Williston. Reading from the report at town meeting: "Your committee have in connection with committees from the other towns purchased a part of the farming tools, what corn and oats they think we shall want and was in hopes we could have reported to the town the whole expense of stocking and getting said farm ready for receiving the poor."

Under the bylaws of the Poor Farm Association, provisions were made for the acceptance of other towns to the Association (Jericho, Hinesburg, and South Burlington would join) and its dissolution. The expenses (or surplus if any) were to be apportioned among the member towns on a percentage of use basis.

An accounting for town meeting in the year 1899 suggests a fully operational dairy farm of thirty-two head, with one bull, three horses, twelve hogs, fifty hens, forty-nine tons of hay, ninety-four tons of ensilage, nine tons of coal, and a very well-stocked larder.

Income was primarily from the sale of milk along with some other farm products. The receipts however covered only about fifty percent of the expenses. The remainder was met by the six member towns according to the number of people each town had sent and by the length of stay equated by week. Shelburne's portion of the deficit was apportioned at 88 $\frac{5}{7}$ weeks at \$1.43 per week for the year's total of \$126.88.

The Poor Farm thus provided a working form of welfare until sold in 1930. The subject of purchasing or leasing another farm appears again in 1936 but was left to the discretion of the selectmen and no further mention is recorded.

The position of Overseer of the Poor existed through 1967 and was superseded by the Town Service Officer which became one of the

Town Manager's duties through 1983. During this time, social welfare responsibilities were shifted from the town to the state.