

Hartland Town Farm

Compiled by Bruce A. Fowler ~ Hartland Historical Society 2020
Including Information from Wayne Libby's 1970 Sesquicentennial Report

Town Farms, also called Poor Farms or Almshouses, were often the last resort for the poor, the elderly and physically or mentally challenged people who were unable to financially support or take care of themselves. Those who were able were put to work on the farm for their keep. It was usually very difficult to leave the Town Farm although some of the more able bodied with temporary financial needs were able to eventually move out.

As we reflect on the history of this former institution, we should remember people didn't choose to live here nor was this a free ride at a luxury resort. These people gave up everything they owned to the town for board and sustenance and were expected to perform numerous laborious tasks to compensate for the expense of supporting them. There are no living persons today who can tell us how these people were viewed in the eyes of the town however the annual funding for support voted by the townspeople in itself speaks to compassion and concern. We do not know what daily life was like living on the farm as a pauper but let us hope they were treated with dignity and that some were able to free themselves from the shackles of poverty when possible.

By 1830, the matter of assisting its citizens who had either fallen on hard times or could not support themselves for other reasons was first addressed by the town. Early Hartland Town Warrants, and later Town Reports, typically noted these funds asked for and raised at Town Meetings as "Liabilities for Support of Paupers". Throughout its history, Hartland was committed to assisting its poor with the title of its leading Town Officials noted for decades in Town Warrants and Town Reports as "Selectmen, Assessors and Overseers of the Poor".

The initial process for "Support of Paupers" involved an auction at Town Meetings where yearly support for each individual was awarded to the highest bidder who in turn received compensation from the town for most of their expenses. A bid of 20 cents is noted from one of these auctions in these early years.

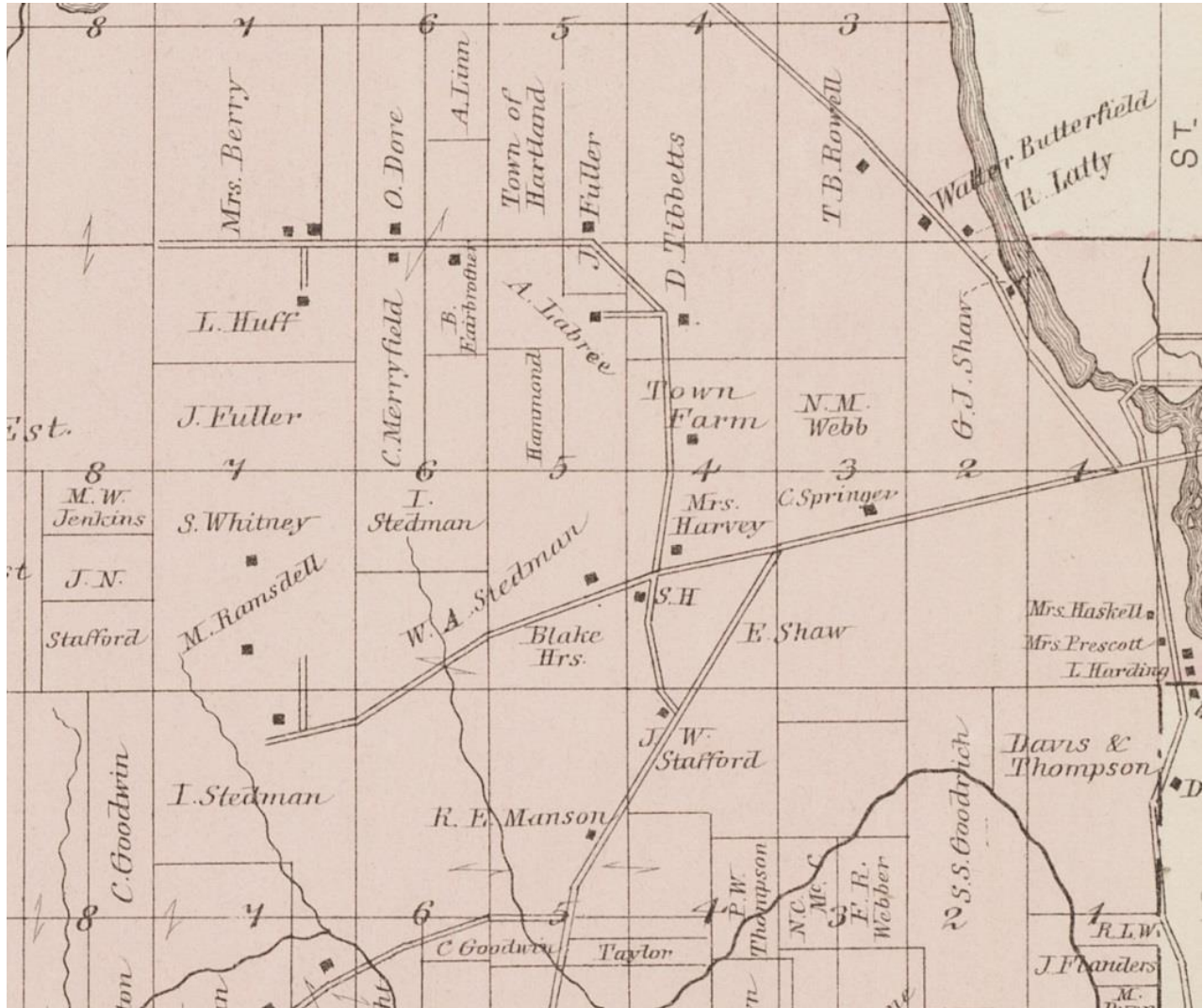
Expectations of the winning bidders often included the individual working for them to further compensate their "investment". The bid prices were in direct correlation to the amount of work to be expected, hence older or physically unable persons were often less money and their conditions were topics of discussion at these public forums. Further mention is made of bid exceptions, such as the bidder not being responsible for medical expenses or funeral costs.

By 1848, the question of a dedicated Town Farm in Hartland was first brought up at the Town Meeting and continued to appear on the warrant for years. In 1849, the individual bidding practice had ceased and was replaced with the Poor bid out as an entire group before the gradual turn in the direction of a Town Farm as an alternative means of support.

In 1862, a committee was appointed at the Town Meeting consisting of Laurence Williams, Thomas Fuller, Sewell E. Prescott and John Ham to investigate the idea of a dedicated Town Farm in Hartland. Finally, some four years later, Hartland's Town Farm opened in 1866.

The town purchased part of a homestead on Huff Hill in West Hartland which had originally been settled and cleared by Hobbs Perkins around 1811. It was owned at the time the town's purchase by Joseph Harvey and later his widow, Lucinda Huff. (Noted below as "Mrs. Harvey")

Hartland Town Farm Location on Huff Hill - 1883



Details are scarce, but in 1884 the Lewiston Sun Journal reported, "*Hartland voted Monday to rebuild the Town Farm Buildings, burned last summer.*"

Reimbursed sponsorship for boarding the Poor continued although the idea behind the Town Farm was for it to become self-sustainable with its occupants raising livestock and gardens to produce goods for sale by local merchants or directly to consumers. The farm was overseen by a Superintendent who typically lived on the premises, often with his family.

Over the years of the Town Farm's existence, Hartland Town Reports listed details of Inventories, Operating Expenses, Values, Income & Sponsorships seen in this example from 1888-1889.

Paid (by citizens) For Board of Paupers on Town Farm for 1888:

Gates Marsh, 52 weeks; Mrs. Plummer, 52 weeks; Fred Whitney, 52 weeks; John Hart, 35 weeks; Mrs. Hart, 25 weeks; Henry Kimball, 12 weeks. Total Weeks Board of Paupers, 228 weeks

Town Farm Inventory

14 cord	Wood	42.00
8 ton	Hay	80.00
1 ton	Straw	4.00
2 each	Oxen	133.00
3 each	Cows	75.00
15 each	Sheep	30.00
19 each	Hens	9.00
2 each	Shoats (Hogs)	20.00
30 bushels	Oats	12.00
4 bushels	Beans	10.00
1 bushel	Peas	1.50
3 bushels	Corn	1.50
1 barrel	Pork	20.00
1 barrel	Soap	5.00
25 lbs.	Beef	1.50
35 bushels	Potatoes	10.50
23 bushels	Apples	5.75
5 bushels	Beets & Turnips	2.50
16 gallons	Vinegar	2.40
73 lbs.	Dried Apples	3.65
5 lbs.	Rolls	2.50
Value of Farm (Building & Lot)		800.00

Hartland Town Report 1902-1903. Article 26: *“To see if the town will vote to approve of the purchase of a portion of the B. F. Fairbrother pasture, by the selectmen.”*

Further references are made in the Town Farm’s operating details to an additional farm and a pasture purchased by the town the previous year noted as an expense and in the current year noted as a credit.

Expenses:

Caroline Harmon, for farm.....	\$ 250.00	(May 15, 1902 - Transaction #1360)
Benjamin F. Fairbrother, for land.....	\$ 40.00	(June 28, 1902 - Transaction #1441)

Credits:

Old Farm on hand.....	\$ 800.00
Harmon Farm	\$ 250.00
B. F. Fairbrother Land.....	\$ 40.00

Caroline (Whitney) Spaulding-Harmon was the widow of Albert Spaulding and likely assumed ownership of her brother Sumner Whitney's Farm on Huff Hill which bordered the old Huff Family homestead in 1883 when she was living next door with her children in 1880. She remarried in 1886 to Elias Harmon of Canaan. Her identity is confirmed on her 1909 death certificate as Caroline Harmon with her known parents' names listed.

Also noted in the 1903 Town Farm Report, *"We have given no credit for the improvement of the buildings which, if properly given, would make the farm self-supporting and something more. We have a good farm now, finely stocked and well supplied. Parties interested are invited to call and see."*

Articles for Town Meetings for consideration by the voters continued to appear for decades in Town Reports. 1909-1910 ~ Article 14: *"To see what sum of money the town will vote to raise for the support of poor for the ensuing year."*

Examples of additional expenses for supplies, services or other items, both on the farm and off, included for payment by the town seen below in the 1909-1910 Town Report:

Stephen Ireland	Superintendent of Farm	225.00
Albion K. Libby	Trip to Sangerville	11.25
M. W. Magoon	Supplies	5.00
Dr. F. A. Bickford	Medical Services	12.50
Elberton P. Dyer	Supplies	11.00
E. H. Whitcomb	Supplies	1.50
Dr. Jennie Fuller	Medical Services	1.00
Elberton P. Dyer	2 Shirts	1.00
Victor B. Jordan	Cow	28.00
Dr. Lynne H. Blanchard	Medical Services	3.00
Allen R. Burton	Casket	32.50
W. A. Blaisdell	Shoeing	6.85
Frank L. Griffith	Saw Filing	2.45
Albert Lawrence	Shoeing	2.65
Hartland Hardware Co.	Supplies	29.44
George M. Lancey	Supplies	48.67
A. B. Parkman	Bull Service	6.00
Buker Brothers	Supplies	2.18
J. P. Manson	Barley Seed	1.00
Carl Randlett	Supplies	292.65
Albert W. Miller	Supplies	6.25

Examples of Income generated by the Town Farm from the 1909-1910 Town Report:

Eggs sold	2.80
Butter sold	5.50
Cream sold	106.32
Potatoes sold	123.60

Calves sold	46.00
Cow sold	9.00
Cows sold, due from State	160.00
Hog sold	53.23
50 fowls sold	25.00
Everett & Mahoney, logs sold	9.80
Norrace Pushor, lumber sold	18.76
Albion K. Libby, lumber sold	21.60
Value of Farm, including pasture	1200.00

Not all those who qualified for assistance lived on the Town Farm itself and instead stayed at rental properties sponsored by local residents. Examples of these sponsored tenants appeared in various Town Reports as separate line items as noted in the 1909-1910 Hartland Town Report:

Expense of Paupers off Farm

Case #1

Paid Noah Woodbury for Rent \$24.00

Case #2

Paid Randlett Bros. for Rent..... \$27.21

Furthermore, residents from other towns often lived at the Town Farm or in a sponsored rental house with those towns paying Hartland annual fees for their support.

Case #3 (Family)

Received of the Town of Charleston \$82.22

By the early 1900s, numerous states had begun creating dedicated State Boards to regulate, inspect and report on Town Farms. Maine's was known as the "State Board of Charities and Corrections" as seen in these inspections below.

Hartland Town Farm Inspection Report (Lewiston Sun Journal)

State Board of Charities and Corrections - November 1, 1913

This town maintains an Almshouse. Buildings are of wood, 2 floors, 10 rooms, 7 of which are used for sleeping rooms with only 1 bed in a room. No sewerage connection. Water supply is a well. Present at the Almshouse on November 1, 1913 are 7 males. Of the persons cared for or assisted during the year, 1 was reported blind, 3 feeble minded, 1 insane.

Hartland Town Farm Inspection Report (Lewiston Sun Journal)

State Board of Charities and Corrections - September 18, 1915

Present on the day of inspection, aged 17 to 40, males, 1 ; 41 to 60, males, 2; total, 3. All reported as mentally defective. All able to do some work, and do help about the farm, under the direction of the superintendent and matron. Personal clothing is in good condition. Bathing required weekly. Largest,

likewise the smallest number of inmates present during the year, 3. Tramps are not fed or lodged. Record of inmates not kept at the farm.

Some interior painting and papering has been done since the previous report, and the chimney is to be rebuilt. The advisability of moving the hog pens to a greater distance from the house is under consideration. This was recommended as soon as funds were available, in order to lessen the number of flies about the building. The spirit of this place is excellent.

Superintendent and Matron: Mr. and Mrs. William I. Stedman

Salary: \$325.00

Experience: 11 years

Superintendent's Quarters: Living Room, Sleeping Room

Inmates' Quarters: Kitchen, Dining Room, 4 Sleeping Rooms

Beds set up and supplied with Bedding: 3

Largest Number in any One Room: 1

Facilities for Separation of the Sexes: Limited

Toilet Facilities: Earth Closets in the Shed

Condition throughout as to Cleanliness: Excellent

Ventilation and Repair: Good. Beds are comfortable, bed linen was clean.

Water Supply: Well

Heating: Stoves (type not specified but likely wood)

Lighting: Oil Lamps

Outside Appearance of Buildings: Fair

Acreage: 125

Livestock on Farm: 2 horses, 8 cows, 10 hogs, 1 other stock, 65 hens and chickens.

Town Farms as a collective group were not without their inherent problems. While no documented cases in Hartland have been discovered, there were residents at many other facilities who experienced mistreatment, destitution, and inhumanity. These reports of abuse, even if only by association, would eventually contribute to the demise of the Town Farm across the state and country.

As noted in Wikipedia, "As they (Almshouses) continued operations into the 19th century, activists such as Dorothea Dix (born in Hampden, Maine) fought for institutional reform. Dix sought to remove children, the mentally ill, and the developmentally disabled from all Town Farms and Almshouses and increase the number of institutions, hospitals, and asylums for those to reside in. As her movement gained momentum, she played a vital role in the establishment and expansion of hospitals for the treatment of the mentally ill."

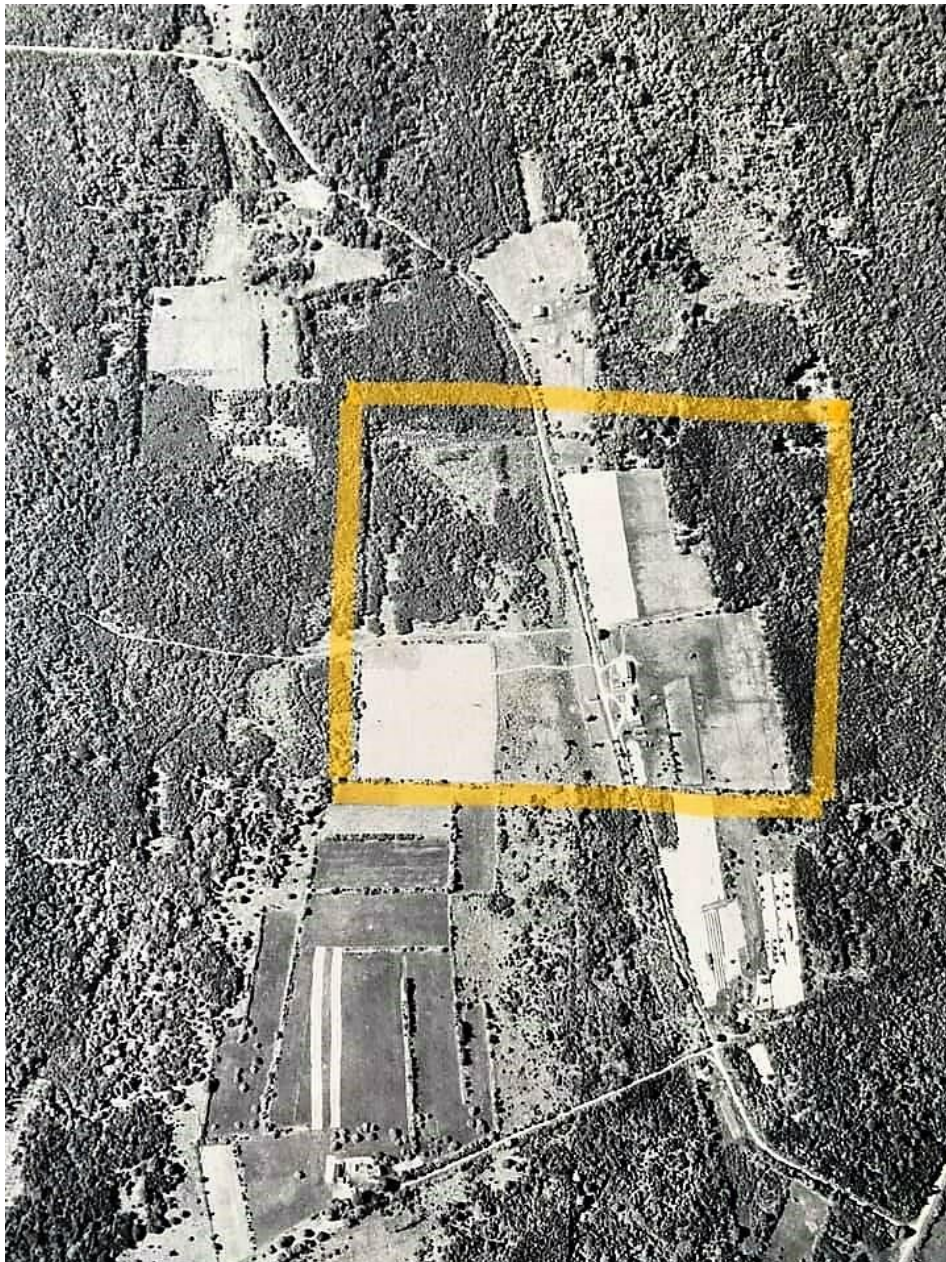
Operating a Town Farm also presented numerous financial burdens for towns as they were rarely self-sustaining as intended. They could be costly to run and the capacity of the inmates to pay for their own keep by working at the farm was greatly overestimated. There was usually not enough staff, the facilities were not always kept up and the poor kept coming. While Hartland's Town Farm did show minimal profits on paper in some years, it was generally operating at a loss once its property, buildings and equipment value was deducted.

Numerous factors, including local economic hardships at the time following WWI, national reform pressures and likely general social stigmas relating to these institutions, brought forth Articles at Hartland's Town Meetings to sell the Town Farm several times and in 1918, and again in 1919, the following article was presented;

Article 53: *"To see what action the town will vote to take in relation to the Town Farm, and to act upon anything relating thereto."*

By 1920, Hartland closed its Town Farm however support for the poor continued from that point onward with money raised by the town which included sponsored guardianship on an individual basis.

Former Hartland Town Farm - 1939



The former Town Farm buildings and lot were eventually purchased by Carl Randlett who sold it to the Earle L. Sherburne in 1943. The farmhouse burnt down in the 1960s.

Sherburne Homestead - 1943

