When our new web page goes live, sometime in the not-too-distant future, it will feature a picture of Nahum Bachelder’s barn, which still exists in East Andover. Nahum played an important part in NH Agriculture for over 35 years. He was born on the family farm, which had been settled by his great-grandfather in 1782. He was an 8th generation descendant of the Rev. Stephen Bachiler, who was an original settler of Hampton in 1632. I am an 11th generation descendant of Stephen, making Nahum and me very distant cousins. Over the years various branches of the family have spelled the name in several different ways, including Batchelder.

Nahum became politically active when he joined the Highland Grange, at age 23, in 1877. He began serving as Secretary of the State Grange in 1883 and became Master in 1891 serving in that capacity until he became Governor in 1903. He served 2 terms on the Executive Committee of the National Grange as well as being Master of the National Grange. Fraternally he was also a member of the Kearsarge Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons.

The second Board of Agriculture was created in 1870 and, in 1887, Nahum became the second Secretary of the Board. This was a paid position, as the Secretary did the real work of the board. Not the least of which was putting together the hardbound annual reports. Additionally, he was a member of the State Cattle Commission, whose charge was to make in-roads in eliminating diseases in cattle.
In 1889 the Secretary was given the additional title of Commissioner of Immigration and Agriculture, under "an act for the development of the agricultural resources of the state through immigration and other means." Bachelder had no precedent to follow and everything he was to do was done with "some hesitancy and doubt." He set upon a mission to survey each town in the state as to the number of abandoned farms. This effort proved to be very successful, and it resulted in an inventory of 1342 properties. The first of many publications was printed, listing those farms along with the 1300 summer boarding houses and hotels in NH. The goal, in part, was to show the viability of investing in NH farms as either boarding houses or for producing food for the existing facilities.

The idea of publishing these booklets proved to be very productive and within a few years around 50% of the properties had been sold. From the research that I have done on our Home Farm it appears that for many years and over several owners it was used as a summer home for families who lived in Massachusetts cities. Additionally, one of our other farms was listed as being available for summer guests.

The issue of abandoned farms did not go away, but nothing about the subject is mentioned in the annual reports after 1892 when the duties of the Commissioner were rolled into the Secretary's responsibilities. In 1899 Bachelder assisted Governor Rollins in establishing Old Home Week, which also had the goal of drawing people back to NH. From 1902 through 1913, the last year of the Board of Agriculture's existence, softbound tabletop sized books titled “New Hampshire Farms for Summer Homes” were published. Nahum did not actively farm during the time he served as Secretary and the buildings began to deteriorate and brush filled the fields. However, over the years he had purchased and renovated a number of properties, renting them out as summer homes, bringing his land holding to about 1000 acres. When the Board of Agriculture was abolished, and with it his livelihood, Nahum revitalized the farm and for five years worked to return it to its full potential.

Unfortunately, all was not well with his personal life. He and his wife had four children, only two of whom survived to adulthood. His only surviving son seemed to be destined to take over the farm, but it was not to be. Henry was born in 1895 and attended New Hampshire College in Durham for three years but returned to the farm to work during WWI. Within a year a mental illness (schizophrenia) changed his life forever. In 1919 his illness had become worse.

Nahum, put his personal property up for sale (his livestock and farm equipment). With the money he raised he took Henry to Washington, D.C., with the hope that he would improve, but after two months it became clear that Henry needed professional treatment. He spent time in two out-of-state facilities and then spent two years in a hotel in Manchester until 1928 when his condition deteriorated further. He was placed in the NH State hospital where he died in 1959 of a heart attack. As the last of his line, it seemed that no one cared enough to have the date of his death inscribed on his headstone in Proctor Cemetery in Andover, where the rest of his family was laid to rest.

After the 1919 sale Nahum only farmed for a few years on a modest scale. Mary's health had been poor for some time and in 1924 they were advised to winter in Florida, but she died there in March of 1925. By now he was 71 and no longer capable of running the farm and sadly his fields fell fallow. The thing that he had worked so hard to prevent now was occurring on his beloved farm. He and Ruth, who had never married, continued to winter in Florida. In 1930, four years before his death, Nahum wrote his memoirs, which can be found on the Secretary of State’s web page, under “Miscellaneous Volumes and Literature.” Ruth died in 1953 at the age of 62 from heart disease, which she had suffered from for a number of years.

Shawn N. Jasper-Commissioner