From Your Commissioner

Old Photos

When I first became commissioner, we did a lot of cleaning out, especially in one closet. In that closet there was a large, narrow box labeled “old photos.” While I had intended to go through it at some point, I hadn’t gotten to it. However, a couple of weeks ago, that box had to be moved, and so I took the time to go through them with Josh Marshall, who hadn’t started working here yet. It turns out that there are about 70 photos, with nearly all of them being farm scenes. They range in size, with the largest ones being over 18” square.

Unfortunately, most of them are not labeled, but a number of them do have buildings or land features that might make them identifiable. Our hope is to scan some of them in and see which ones can be identified. There are only a couple which are dated; those are from 1925 and 1926, which gives us a clue as to the age of the rest of them. My guess is that some of them go back to the early years of the last century, and a few may be as recent as the 1930s.

One labeled picture is of a herd of cows at the New Hampshire College, with the caption “Leaders of the Herd.” The New Hampshire College of Life Sciences and Mechanical Arts became the University of New Hampshire in 1923, so we also know that the picture is prior to that date. That is one picture that I definitely want to put online, and have the original framed for display here in the office.

As sometimes happens, things that are supposed to be returned aren’t. There is a beautiful picture of a sunset over Lake Wentworth, with the note that it should be returned to J.K. Mason of Warner. The photo is dated from 1925. If any heirs of Mr. Mason read this column, I think we might be obligated to turn the photo over to them.

One of my favorites is one with the caption “off to the fair.” It shows a large barn in the background, with a wagon hitched to a team of horses loaded with crates of what could be chickens and produce; lined up alongside of that are six men/boys standing with seven members of the bovine family. I certainly hope they didn’t have too far to travel.

What shocked me, was the photo that I pulled out of the box, which was of my grandfather’s brooder house. It wasn’t labeled, but I recognized it immediately, as I have a similar photo hanging on my office wall from my own collection. The one in the box is far larger than any I have (about 18” square). It was also the only photo in the “collection” having to do with poultry farming.

I think that the department might have had this picture, due to the unique nature of the system. The brooder house was built around 1910, by the man from whom my grandfather bought the farm. The building was about 70’ long and 24’ wide. The picture accompanying this article is of the same building. What make it unique is that it was heated by a single coal fired boiler, which produced hot water or steam (I never asked) which circulated through the building. Normally there were hovers, which the chicks could get under, much as they would under the wings of their mothers, but as the picture shows this set-up was much different.
I know that this building was torn down in 1959, but the foundation is still there. Looking at the picture, I imagine that the set-up was labor intensive, both in terms of day-to-day operations and in clean-up. I would suspect that was the reason that its unique features didn’t catch on. I regret not asking my father about how the system worked and when it was last used. I am ten years too late to ask those question now, and there is no one else left to ask.

Shawn N. Jasper-Commissioner