

The Sterling Historical Chronicle

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Sterling Historical Society

VOLUME 2

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ISSUE 3

40 Years Since the Revere Textile Mill Fire

Dear Readers,

2020 is here and we have so many exciting things in the works. Material donations continue to come in and they never cease to be exciting! We have received a photo album of Revere Mill fire photos taken by professional photographer, Arnold N. Delmonico, which were presented to former Oneco Postmaster, Lester Burdick. We have also received a repository of old newspaper articles saved by the Burdicks, to add to our growing collection of articles and ephemera! The Sterling Memorial School yearbooks are starting to trickle in as well, as a former student from the class of 1997 donated 1992, 1994, 1995, and 1996. We still need the rest, but the yearbook coordinator from SCS has reached out to us to figure out how they can help.

Speaking of Sterling Memorial and Sterling Community Schools, we have recently lost both Kevin Leddy, longtime teacher of the upper grades, and executive assistant Beverly Boyd. Both of these individuals had 20-year careers in the Sterling school system, and were very familiar faces in our community. Mrs. Boyd also volunteered with both Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, as well as Project Pin and other organizations, and truly exemplified what it meant to be a part of this community. Tributes to both Mr. Leddy and Mrs. Boyd are on pages 4 and 5.

The tributes continue as brothers Fred and Earl Pike will both be posthumously inducted into the Rhode Island Bluegrass Hall of Fame on April 17. The remaining Pike family members, Gordon, Dawn, and Fred Pike Jr. will accept the accolades in their honor. More on page 3.

We have reached the 40th anniversary of the loss of our once largest employer when Revere Textile Corp. went up in flames thanks to an overzealous arsonist. I wasn't born yet, and we moved to town some seven years after the fire, so I remember riding around town and seeing the ruins for years. Therefore, YOUR memories of the fire are on page 2. The Sterling Historical Society, in conjunction with Frank Decker, once published a book about the mill's history from 1808-1980 back when there was still a question as to whether the mill would rebuild. Considering the mill is now only a memory, we are hard at work on revising and updating this mill history book to have a new edition available for this year's Family Day.

There are so many new things happening all around us! I wish I had room to talk about the lovely tour Zoe Madden gave me recently of the Sterling Organic Farm (formerly Wayne's Organic Garden) but it will have to wait for the next issue as I am out of room. In the meantime, learn more about the Sterling Organic Farm from Zoe's interview in the What's Up Sterling? Podcast, produced by Keith and Joslyn Richards. What a great way to learn more about your community!

-Megan McGory-Gleason, President

40 YEARS AGO: March 1, 1980 REVERE TEXTILE BURNS

The loss of the mill changed Sterling and its inhabitants forever.



Livelihood Up In Flames



The sky was lit up for miles around the night of the blaze. Above, owner Howard Glick stumbles from the inferno that was once his mill.

"I was there. I worked there. Still miss the place. It was a great place to work. Howie Glick was a good man to work for. I never saw such an intense fire as that."
- Bill Chabot Sr.

"My Dad was a firefighter for Plainfield. He fought this one. I remember him coming home for a break. His firefighting stuff was stuck on. He had to stand in the shower to get it off. I helped him some. I was 8 years old and I remembering being in awe."
- Veronica Phillips Moran

"We were at the Forrester's when we heard the alarm come over the scanner, so we went down to Wacky Pond to check it out, we saw that it was more than just some smoke, we jumped in my car and parked in front of the office to see what was going on, before we knew it the heat and flames pushed us back over the bridge to Carl's restaurant, my car was still in front of the office. I saw Paul Hagge who was working the fire on our side of the bridge— there was another firefighter getting ready to break the window of my car so they could drag it out of the way— I gave Paul my keys and he battled the flames, jumped in my car, drove it over all the big hoses and over the bridge, the paint was blistered off all over the left side...One of the most spectacular things I have ever seen!" -Roy Ethier



"We were standing in front of the post office and you could feel the heat from there; flames at one point blocked route 14 completely, could not get a vehicle through" -Brian Theriault



"I worked there at the time. Went inside when the fire had just began. The fire swept fast along the ceilings as the wood was extremely dry and oily. It was truly a tinder box. My car across the street had melted tail lights! It was an amazing sight to watch. Lots of toxic and flammable chemicals only made things that much more dangerous." - Bruce Glaude

"My first big fire." - Peter Capobianco

"Me & Peter [Capobianco] on a 2 inch hose line in the back alley when we ran out of water, boy did we bail fast." -Gary Frink Sweet

"Was one hell of a fire....sat on a hose cannon, all night....tried like hell to save the office, at that point..." - Dudley Young

"I remember it well . My friend and I were on my back steps when it first started and it didn't take long before all hell broke loose." -Joe Ogden

"It was a very devastating day in my life. My ex-husband and I both worked there. I was out on maternity leave with my second child. We had a brand new home, brand new car, one child and one on the way. My mom and dad both worked there too. Luckily my ex went to work with Revere's other facility in Branford, CT. So many people lost their jobs. The explosion was so loud and burning embers flew for miles. I remember it so well." -Anna Gagner



"I remember that fire. I was four years old, we lived on Rt. 14 a mile or so up from the mill. There was burning debris from the fire landing in our yard and the FD was out all night spraying. I remember driving by in the days that followed to see what was left of the mill and it being all iced over." -EJ Bessette

Photos above by Arnold N. Delmonico; Newspaper clippings contributed by Bob Jordan, Anna Gagner, Jim and Mary Mortimer

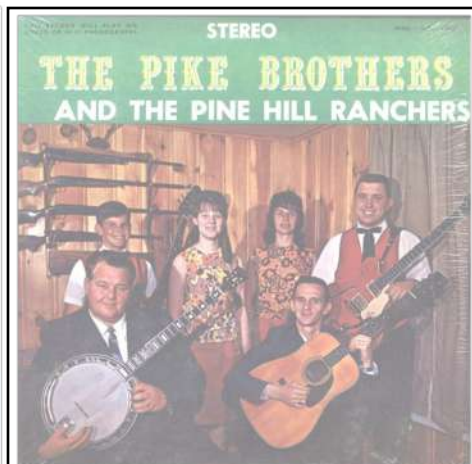
The Pike Brothers and the Pine Hill Ranchers



1970: The Pike Brothers and the Pine Hill Ranchers from left to right:

Sam Thibodeau, Earl Pike, Gordon Pike, Earlene Pike, Fred Pike, and Dave Papuga.

Earlene unfortunately passed away from bone cancer in 1972 at the age of 18.



1968: The first LP!

Other band members included Earl's wife at the time, Nita (mother to Gordon and Earlene), and John Piela of Canterbury. After Earlene's passing, the band disbanded, with Fred Pike moving to Maine and beginning that state's bluegrass festival and playing with other bands. Gordon Pike continues to jam today, bringing the tradition of bluegrass to new generations.

2020 RIBA Hall of Fame

FRED & EARL PIKE **RICH GUILBAULT**

Induction Ceremony - Fri, April 17
6:00pm - The Imperial Room
One Rhodes Place - Cranston, RI

From Gordon Pike: "A special thanks to the Rhode Island Bluegrass Association. The Pike Family is honored to be asked to accept the award for my father, Earl Pike, and my uncle Fred for inducting the Pike Brothers into the Rhode Island Bluegrass Hall of Fame. This is the first time the Pike Brothers have been recognized for any award for their part in New England bluegrass history. On April 17, 2020, my sister Dawn Pike, along with my cousin, Fred Pike Jr. , and myself will be there to accept the award at the induction of the Pike Brothers into the Rhode Island Bluegrass Hall of Fame. As you all may know, the Pike Brothers were the third band to record for Rebel Records. My dad, Earl, recorded other New England bluegrass groups when he owned part of the New England Rebel Recording Studio in Sterling, Connecticut. Again, we thank Bill Thibodeau and Debbie Hall and the rest of the Rhode Island Bluegrass Association , for making this all possible. Sincerely, Gordon , Dawn, and Fred Pike Jr."

IF YOU WANT TO GO: This event is open to the public!

Celebratory jamming will follow induction of the honorees.

Tickets are \$12 for RIBA members and \$15 for non-members in advance, and \$20 for everyone at the door.

Kevin Leddy July 28, 1941- January 27, 2020

Kevin R. Leddy, 78, passed away unexpectedly at his home in Plainfield, CT on January 27, 2020. Kevin was born in Pawtucket, RI on July 28, 1941, a son to the late Lillian (Beaulieu) Slaimen and Joseph L. Leddy. Kevin earned a B.A. Degree from St. Michael's College in VT and a Master's Degree from the University of Connecticut. He devoted his life to education and taught at various schools in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, working from 1985-2005 teaching at the Sterling Memorial School in Oneco, CT. Kevin had strong faith and was a religious Brother of the Sacred Heart. He was a loving son, brother and uncle and will be missed by those who loved him. Kevin was survived by his only living brother, Robert Leddy, of Cumberland, RI along with several nieces and nephews. He is predeceased by his siblings John, Joseph, David and Joan Leddy. Burial was within Mt. St. Mary Cemetery in Pawtucket, RI. *obituary courtesy of Dougherty Brothers Funeral Home*



**Kevin Leddy was an educator at
Sterling Memorial School
from 1985-2005.**

"Kevin was just a kind man who was always there for anyone. I am sad because I will miss him, especially around the holidays. One thing brings me comfort, a few weeks ago, I was hanging out with him and he said he was ok to go. He feared nothing because he had God on his side...the world lost Kevin Leddy and it is not a better place without you... I thank God often I met the Leddy brothers. I don't know why, but they took an interest in me and I am better for it." - Paul Iannuzzi

"A very nice man, and an awesome teacher. I still remember him explaining the Civil War to me 30 years ago." - Carl Tetreault

"He was the best elementary school math teacher I ever had!" -Rebecca Gervasio

"I had the privilege of having Mr. Kevin Leddy for 6th grade math. He was such an awesome teacher, strict but kind. He saw the good in everyone and never gave up on you. He had a sense of humor and you knew there would never be a dull moment, you looked forward for class. Mr. Leddy was your teacher, mentor, and friend. He will be truly missed by everyone. RIP my friend, thank you for all the fun times." - Jonathan Rose

"He gave me a ride to work this past summer. He was a good teacher. Best one I ever had. I'm always going to be grateful for Kevin. I love you Mr. Kevin Leddy, Rock the Heavens." - Hunter Ostrout

"He was a great person and always kind." - Sarah Dexter

"I'm so blessed to say he was a huge part of all of my children's lives! My Jonathan wore the tie he gave him in grammar school to his high school graduation! He was so proud to wear that tie to show Mr. Leddy what he helped Jon accomplish!" - Jennifer Malbourn

"Mr. Leddy was my 6th grade teacher and I'll always remember him and that year. For a few reasons...I had my appendix taken out and he did a lot for me. He made sure I was comfortable in the classroom and made sure everything, regarding school work and make-up work was good to go. And the other reason was because of him. He was something else, yelling about soggy cornflakes and wet noodles. Playing games with \$20 bills, with hopes of winning that \$20, but we never did. But one thing that will always stick is his constant studying of trivial pursuit cards. He would write down the ones he didn't know and study them...he had PAGES! But...whenever there was a question regarding "leave it to beaver" he would call me, where ever I was in the school and ask me the question. Definitely sad to hear about his passing, he was a part of my childhood." - Tayler Aubin

"He was one of my favorites." - Lauren Ventrone Herlihy

"Rest easy Kevin - we were all very lucky to have been blessed with your friendship." - Holly Wood

Beverly Boyd November 13, 1954- January 24, 2020



Moosup - Beverly Jane (St. John) Boyd, 65, of Moosup, died on January 24, 2020, unexpectedly but peacefully at home. Bev was born on November 13, 1954, in Norwich, the middle child of nine, to the late Edward Sr. and Rita St. John of Jewett City. She attended St. Mary's School, graduated from Griswold High School in 1972 then the New England Business Academy. Bev married Timothy K. Boyd of Griswold on November 15, 1975, at St. Mary's Church in Jewett City, and in 2020 they are celebrating 45 years of marriage. They made their home in Moosup, where they raised their two children, State Representative Patrick Boyd of Pomfret and Kelly A. Boyd (married to Alexis Bingham) of Colchester. She adored being the "Mémère" to her four grandchildren, Olive, Rivers, Killian and Pearl. Prior to her retirement in 2019, she worked for several school districts in their central offices, including Griswold, Ledyard, Plainfield, and for the last 20 years at the Sterling Community School. Bev was a dedicated volunteer in several local organizations, including the Relay for Life, Project PIN, All Hollows Church, and Scouting. As a youth, she was a Girl Scout and an Explorer. As an adult, she served as a Girl Scout leader, Cub Scout leader with Pack 36, Committee Member of Troop 54, Cub Day Camp Program Director, Roundtable Commissioner and a District Committee Member for several years being awarded the prestigious Silver Beaver Award for service to youth in 2004. Beverly always enjoyed cooking, baking, family gatherings, holidays, traveling with Tim, the Red Sox, event planning, and spending time with her grandchildren. She could always be counted upon to help other people. Her warm smile and holiday cookies will be missed greatly. The family asks that in lieu of flowers donations be made in her honor to the Friends of the June Norcross Webster Scout Reservation, c/o John Haskell, 100 Lake Road, Jewett City CT 06351. Checks payable to CRC. Burial took place in St. Mary's Cemetery, Griswold, CT. *-obituary courtesy of Gagne-Piechowski Funeral Home*

"I worked at SMS & SCS with her and she was always so kind & helpful. We did the D.C. trips with 8th grade. I will miss her."
-Pat Simkowski

"Bev or 'Mrs. Boyd' as she was known to all of us through Troop 54 was such a great positive presence and contributor to many boys' lives. I will miss that loud booming laugh, that always was present in her company...She has clearly made her mark in this world on many of us." - Jeremy Disch

"We were so shocked and sorry to hear this sad news. She was such a wonderful woman and did so much for so many." -Marlene and Marc Barry

"I'm grateful that I got to spend a lot of time with her at day camp last year, and she was great as always with the kids. So dedicated. Always fun to be around. She will be missed, and she made an impact on countless lives." -Mike Cooney

"Bev was my friend. She was a tremendous help to our Knights of Columbus coat program in Sterling..." -John D. Ryan

"I am so very sorry to hear of Bev's passing. She was a phenomenal woman and friend who was always willing to help others. She will be missed so much!" -Holly Wood

"Life just isn't fair! She had so much to look forward to. She just adored her beautiful grandchildren. So sad to think that they will be growing up without her." -Dottie Babcock-Capobianco

"I credit her for getting me more involved in the behind the scenes work of scouting to keep everything running smoothly. I had great admiration for her work in that arena." -Richard Davis

"We at Project Pin were saddened to hear of Bev's passing. She brought her enthusiasm and heartfelt love with her everyday she volunteered. She will be missed." -Timothy Kettle

"She will be remembered as a very dedicated volunteer who brought fun and happiness to all." -Randy Becker

Research Requests

These are requests which have been received by our society. We do our best to answer questions but perhaps our readers may be able to help, too! Please email

sterlinghistoricalsocietyct@gmail.com with information if you are able to help.

- We are looking for the Dorrance family Bible featuring Reverend Samuel Dorrance's family and kin, or Samuel Dorrance and Anne Tully's family (a different Samuel Dorrance, but related).

Our Wishlist

- Newspaper clippings! Anything pertaining to Sterling/Oneco always welcome!
- Vintage or Antique Sterling/Oneco/Ekonk postcards or real photo postcards (RPPCs), we just want to copy the images for our archives!
- Book: Do You See Ice? Inuit and Americans at Home and Away by Karen Routledge (it references Ambrose Bates' diary, so we would like to add it to our library.)

We have many resources available in our room for your own historical research including the C.E.T.A. Research papers compiled by a team of researchers in 1978 and led by Carolyn Bailey-Orr. Much of the research was later compiled by Mrs. Orr into her book, The Roads Lead Back to Glory (1982), of which only 50 copies were originally printed. Another 50 were printed in 1991, and we are currently at work on scanning and digitizing her book in order to have it reprinted in the future.

Other resources we have include Frank Decker's life work of The Pike Saga, five large tomes of genealogical research written by Mr. Decker from the 70's through 1990. We will also be digitizing these and printing them so that they will be available to the public for the first time ever.

We also have The Hale Collection, some early Voluntown church records, and many hard to find & out of print books relating to all of eastern Connecticut. Come visit us and learn something new!

The **Sterling Historical Chronicle** is published quarterly with issues in March, June, September, and December.

Deadline for submissions: May 1, 2020

Sterling Historical Society Officers:

President: Megan McGory-Gleason

Vice President: Arlene Roberts

Secretary: Ruth Battey

Treasurer: Ron Marchesseault

Curator: Michael Gadoury

The Sterling Historical Society is located in Room 19 of the Sterling Municipal Building (the former Sterling Memorial School). Our mailing address is:

Sterling Historical Society

c/o Sterling Town Hall

P.O. Box 157

1183 Plainfield Pike

Oneco, CT 06373

Our meeting schedule is the **second Tuesday of every month except December** at 7PM unless otherwise announced. Our room is open from 6-8pm on that same second Tuesday, by appointment, and by chance.

Email: sterlinghistoricalsocietyct@gmail.com

Website: <http://sterlinghistoricalsocietyct.weebly.com>

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