



## Greetings From Winchester!

by Nancy Schrock

Before the Internet or even the telephone, people used postcards to send quick messages to family and friends. Costing only a penny, the cards arrived the next day, often with a view of their hometown. Winchester was no exception.

The public had an opportunity to view Winchester through its postcards on June 22, 2011, when Winchester resident John Cleary shared his extensive collection at an evening program. Some of the most interesting cards showed views of trolleys, old railroad stations, downtown before the railway was elevated, diagonal parking

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## Career of Maribel Vinson Owen Remembered by Sports Illustrated Writer

by Ellen Knight

Fifty years ago, on Feb. 15, 1961, the stunning news reached Winchester that its three champion figure skaters, along with the entire U.S. figure skating team and its coaches, had been killed in a plane crash in Belgium while en route to the world championships in Prague. Later that year, the name Vinson-Owen was given to the new elementary school on Johnson Road as a memorial. It is believed to be the only school in the country named after figure skaters.

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Maribel Owen with her daughters,  
Laurence (left) and Maribel (right)  
(Courtesy of the Winchester Archival Center)

**The Black Horse Bulletin took a summer vacation. This issue (April-June) covers many of the Society events from the spring and early summer. A fall edition of the newsletter will cover autumn events.**

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Publisher: Margo Attaya

The Black Horse Bulletin is published quarterly by  
the Winchester Historical Society. Subscription is free with membership.  
Winchester Historical Society • 15 High Street • Winchester, MA 01890  
781.721.0135 [www.winchesterhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.winchesterhistoricalsociety.org) • [www.sanbornhouse.org](http://www.sanbornhouse.org)

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**Society Executive Director**  
Rebekah Beaulieu

*Greetings from Winchester! - continued from page 1)*

on Main Street, long-gone buildings, and the strings of wires for telegraphy, phone lines, and electricity.

John explained how to date postcards by the color printing process, stamps and post office markings, and the placement of handwritten notes. He continues to add to his collection via eBay and collectors' shows. John has amassed arguably the largest collection of postcards of Winchester and has generously allowed the Town Archival Center to scan them into its collection.

For a sample of the postcards, see the exhibit on the Society's website at: <http://www.winchesterhistorical-society.org/archives>.



*A matchbook from Randalls Soda Fountain, Mount Vernon Street, Winchester (Courtesy of the Winchester Archival Center, Cleary Collection.)*

## Give Appreciated Securities

*by Douglas Marmon, Treasurer*

The Historical Society can now accept donations in the form of securities. Transfers can be made directly from your brokerage account to the Society's. Call the Society for details.

For securities held longer than one year, you can deduct their full fair market value, regardless of what you originally paid for them. You also avoid paying capital gains tax.

*(Career of Maribel Vinson Owen remembered by Sports Illustrated writer - continued from page 1)*

The Owens were not just local celebrities. Maribel Vinson Owen, according to Ed Swift, a senior writer with *Sports Illustrated*, was the first American skating star. She helped popularize figure skating in the United States. In fact, Swift said, "she was very much the face of it" and was also "one of the greatest coaches in U.S. history." Further, she was the first woman sports writer hired by the *New York Times*. Calling her a Renaissance woman, Swift said, "She was a success at pretty nearly everything she got into."

Swift, co-author of the books *My Sergei with Ekaterina Gordeeva*, *Eleven Seconds* with former Boston University hockey player Travis Roy, and Katarina Witt, was invited to speak in Winchester about Maribel Owen by the Winchester Historical Society. During his program, Swift said he might also write a book on Owen. "I find her fascinating."

Maribel Owen was the daughter of Tom Vinson and Gertrude Cliff who met while skating on the Charles River and who moved to Winchester in 1911, the year their only child was born. Owen went onto the ice at age 3. At age 12 she won the national junior championship and at age 16 won the first of nine U.S. ladies' titles. Tom Vinson, Swift said, allowed his daughter to compete with the understanding she had to keep her grades up and had to understand that figure skating is a subjectively judged sport, something being talked about now, 90 years later.

Owen was home schooled until age 9 when she went to the Girls' Latin School in Boston. From ages 10 to 16, she would get up at 5:00, take the streetcar to Boston, be at the Boston arena to practice at 7, practice for an hour and a half, go to classes, then get in more practice, and take the streetcar home.

At age 16, she qualified for the 1928 Olympics and came in fourth. At the World Championships she placed second. That same year she and Sonja Henie were in a special performance in front of the King and Queen. The ice was too cold and hard, and both fell. Nevertheless, flat on the ice, Owen managed a bow before the royal couple.

(Career of Maribel Vinson Owen remembered by  
Sports Illustrated writer - continued from page 2)

At Radcliffe, she was a tennis player and sculler and rode horses. Skating, however, was her passion. She won every national singles title from 1928 to 1937, except 1934 when she didn't complete. She also won six pairs titles.

Owen skated in the 1932 Olympics, where she won a bronze medal, and in the 1936 Olympics. She was, Swift said, "the best American skater, though she did not place as well internationally as nationally." She was never able to best Henie, her long-time rival, but they both helped popularize skating, Henie with her movies and Owen with her ice shows.

In 1933, Owen graduated from Radcliffe. She was hired by the Times in 1934 and

turned pro in 1937. She developed an ice show which played all over the country and which would sell out places like Madison Square Garden and Boston Garden. She also had a little portable rink, called "Lake Maribel," which could be set up at places like Copley Plaza. She appealed to a high-class clientele and got sensational reviews, Swift said. She became, in fact, a celebrity. Her picture and stories about her shows would appear on the same newspaper pages with pictures and news of movie stars.

Joining her in the shows was Guy Owen whom she married in 1938. They had two daughters, Maribel and Laurence. After marriage, the Owens settled in California. After the marriage ended in divorce in 1950 and Tom Vinson died in 1952, his daughter and granddaughters returned to Winchester to live with Gertrude Vinson in the Josiah Locke House on High Street.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, Owen concentrated on teaching and coaching. Her prize pupils were her daughters, Little Maribel, who became a champion pairs skater, and Laurence, a U.S. singles champion. Both were on the team which perished (along with their mother) in Belgium.

As a teacher and coach, Maribel Owen left a legacy in the skating world. She coached five of the 12 skaters on the U.S. team at the '60 Olympics and trained other skaters who had to carry on the business of coaching and training after the 1961 tragedy. She was "one of the most important people in a number of successful peoples' lives," Swift said.

In several amusing anecdotes, Swift portrayed Owen as a woman who "had a lot of moxie," who emphasized culture and education but cared little for the state of her car or about housekeeping. She was loud and could be demanding with her students. A disciplinarian, she was also inspiring. Swift concluded his talk by saying Maribel Vinson Owen was "one of the most extraordinary athletes this county has ever known."

The 1961 team has been remembered in the movie *Rise* and in the books *Indelible Tracings* and *Frozen in Time*. Swift himself wrote an article about Maribel Vinson Owen for the Feb. 21, 2011 edition of Sports Illustrated, *The Day the Music Stopped*, which is available on-line.

(Condensed from an article published in the Daily Times Chronicle, Winchester Edition, March 3, 2011)



Sports Illustrated writer Ed Swift prepares to speak to a full house at the Jenks Center on the career of Maribel Vinson Owen. He is pictured with Susan Keats (left) of the Winchester Historical Society, who introduced the program, and Rebekah Beaulieu, Society Executive Director. (Bill Ryerson photo)



## Town Day Highlights Sanborn House Renovation

by Carol Keller

Once again Winchester was blessed with fine weather for Town Day, June 4, 2011. The Society was luckily able to unveil the second major renovation project at the Sanborn House with outstanding service from their contractor, Prism Builders, as well as town employees. A new mahogany door and entryway (a replicate of the original), an ADA accessible path and front entrance, refurbishment of the front columns, and new paint for the peeling trim and window frames were all completed in time. The House took a giant leap towards respectability and the community shared in the excitement. A grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the matching monies raised with generous donations from EnKa, the Griffin Foundation, the Society board and Society members made this renovation a reality.

In addition to tours of the Sanborn House, a Strawberry Festival featuring strawberry shortcake was offered along with a Classic Car show. Historic trolley tours once again left from the Town Common and were lead by volunteers from the Society, thanks to the trolley sponsorship by Winchester Savings Bank.

Here are photos that capture the community spirit of the day.



Community families line up to get the free tickets for the trolley rides distributed by Society board members, Laurie Miinniti (r) and Candace Van Aken (l). (Photo by Carol Keller)

A crowd gathers to board the trolley at the Town Common with the assistance of Douglas Marmon, Society Treasurer (l) and David Stirling, Society board member (r). (Photo by Carol Keller)







*Gail Sjo and Tom Sevigny, Society board member, set up to serve the strawberry shortcakes. (Photo by David Feigenbaum)*



*Susan Keats, Society board member and Rebekah Beaulieu, Society Executive Director, both center, start a tour of the Sanborn House, while Nancy O'Heron, Society board member, left, answers question for visitors. (Photo by David Feigenbaum)*

*Families enjoy the spring sunshine and the grounds of the Sanborn House. (Photo by Carol Keller)*



*Bob Colt, Society President, welcomes members, Susan and Douglas Youmans, through the restored main entry of the Sanborn House. (Photo by Carol Keller)*





The Ginn estate that was on Ginn Road, Winchester (architect Ernest Flagg.) Photo courtesy of the Winchester Archival Center

## Between Two Cities: New York Architects and the Domestic Architecture of Greater Boston, 1895-1930

Rebekah Beaulieu, Winchester Historical Society Executive Director, was the keynote speaker at the Society's 2011 Annual Meeting. Beaulieu's talk, entitled *Between Two Cities: New York Architects and the Architecture of Greater Boston, 1895-1930*, concerned the shift in the architectural field from Boston to New York City at the turn of the 20th century. Three commissions of domestic architecture in the greater Boston area were directed by New York based architects: the Faulkner Farm landscape by Charles A Platt, the William H. Baltzell House by Carrère & Hastings, and Winchester's own Edwin Ginn House by Ernest Flagg. Using these case studies, Beaulieu addressed the increasing formalization of architectural education, the client-patron relationship, and the connection between architecture, taste, and wealth.

Beaulieu originally presented the research at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the College Art Association, where she represented both the Winchester Historical Society and the American and New England Studies Program at Boston University, in which she is currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate.

## The Sanborn Fortune

by Ellen Knight

Until recently very little has been known about the Sanborns of Sanborn House, including the reason they had to leave the house. Now, thanks to the digitization of newspapers and to the Winchester Public Library's subscription to *Historic Boston Globe*, we have an insight into this.

As is well known, Oren Sanborn was the son of James Solomon Sanborn, a partner in the Chase & Sanborn Coffee Co. Although Oren Sanborn's profession was always listed as a merchant in the tea and coffee business, his fortune apparently did not come as much from any company salary as from inheritances.

Oren and Rena Sanborn moved to Winchester in 1901 and first lived on Sheffield Road. In 1903 his father died and left him \$125,000 and a trust fund of \$7,300 a year. In Dec. 1904, Sanborn bought the two lots on High Street for his new home. In 1905, his brother Charles





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(The Sanborn Fortune - continued from page 7)

died, and Oren received a sum between \$200,000 and \$300,000. That year he sold the Sheffield Road house. While the Sanborns' new house on High Street was under construction, they arranged to live temporarily in the former Samuel Elder House on Central Street. Construction of the new house reportedly cost a quarter million dollars.

According to 1919 and 1927 newspaper articles, the couple separated in 1915, although listings in the directories, poll lists, and 1920 census place him at the High Street house. In 1919 a garage owner sued Sanborn over a bill for tires for his wife's automobile. The judge ordered him to pay the bill, ruling that the automobile was a reasonable expense for this family which he had to pay. In 1917, Sanborn received an inheritance of \$5,000 from his sister Helen's estate, as well as \$10,000 owed him by his son. This did not prevent his selling the house in 1921. Rena continued to live there for a few years while it passed through a few hands. However, in 1925, the Downes family bought it with the intention of moving in.

When Oren sold the house, he created a trust fund for his wife and daughter and let his wife have all the furnishings except a few items he reserved for himself. When notified that the house had been sold to the Downes family, Rena Sanborn arranged and advertised a sale of all the furnishings – "custom-made furniture, music room of Italian walnut, draperies, domestic and imported rugs and carpets, baby grand and upright pianos, cut plush wall covering, oil paintings (by prominent artists), marble and bronze statuary, library of high-grade books, etc., etc." – for Jan. 27, 1925.

The items Oren had reserved were still in the house for he claimed that his wife had not let him take them. Before the sale, Oren conveyed his items to Howard Chapin so the latter might bring suit against Mrs. Sanborn to recover them. Chapin brought an action which resulted in a deputy sheriff arriving two hours before the auction and attaching everything including daughter Helen's clothing. Although the sale went forward on Feb. 2, since the house had been full of prospective buyers when the auction was stopped, Rena and Helen Sanborn claimed great shame and humiliation as well as a financial loss, and both filed suits against Chapin and Sanborn's lawyer for malicious abuse of process, suing for \$50,000 each. Helen also included her father in her suit. In 1927, the suits were settled. Mrs. Sanborn was awarded \$25,506. Helen was awarded \$1 in her suit against her father.

The state of Oren's finances was revealed when Rena brought suit against her husband in 1927, claiming mismanagement of her trust fund so that she had nothing and was dependent upon her daughter. He claimed to be nearly penniless, having no property, no bonds, no money, only a small trust fund which he called "a spendthrift fund." She maintained he still had enough to support her. He reportedly said, if the court ordered him to provide support for his wife, he could not do it as he did not have the funds. He himself then was reportedly living with his son James in Wellesley.

"Asked where his fortune went," the *Boston Globe* reported, "Mr. Sanborn said he spent it. It just went on a man's happiness." Mrs. Sanborn claimed that he deceived her about the size of his fortune and that he spent his money on horses, maintaining expensive stables, automobiles, and other luxuries. He also enjoyed yachting.

Whatever he was or was not able to pay, the squabbling over money ended in 1928 when Oren died in Providence. Rena, who moved to an apartment in Boston in 1925, continued living in the city through her own death in 1947.

(Sources include the *Boston Globe*, Nov. 5, 1905; Jan. 18, 1919; March 9, 1925; Feb. 18, 1927; March 9, 1927.)

## Archival Center Hours

The Winchester Archival Center has new open hours for this fall and winter - Thursdays, 10 a.m. to noon. On the third Thursday of the month, it is also open from 3 to 5 p.m.

Research assistance is available during the open hours and may also be requested by e-mailing the Center at [archives@winchester.us](mailto:archives@winchester.us) or leaving a message at 781-721-7146.

- Meetings** Board meetings are held at the Sanborn House Historical and Cultural Center on the third Tuesday of the month (exception, December 13, 2011) at 7:30 PM. The meetings are open to the public and all are welcome.
- Programs** **Tuesday, October 4, 2011: "Drawing Toward Home: Designs for Domestic Architecture from Historic New England,"** Lorna Condon, Historic New England, 7:00 PM, Winchester Public Library
- Saturday, October 15, 2011: Sanborn House "Facelift" Celebration,** 7:00-10:00 PM, Sanborn House (tickets \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500 or a separate donation; RSVPs by mail, call 781-721-0135 with questions)
- Tuesday, November 1, 2011: "The Middlesex Canal, Winchester's 'Highway' 1803-1853",** Thomas Raphael, Chairman of the Executive Committee, Middlesex Canal Commission, 7:30 PM, Sanborn House
- Sunday, December 4, 2011: Holiday Party,** 2:00-4:00 PM, Sanborn House
- New Years Eve: "Black and White Ball,** Sanborn House
- Help Wanted** The Society has many volunteer opportunities. Some tasks can be done at home, others in the Sanborn House. You can help with our programs, collections, or the Sanborn House. For more information, contact Rebekah Beaulieu (781-721-0135; email [director@winchesterhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:director@winchesterhistoricalsociety.com)) or Nancy Schrock (781-721-1229; email: [ncschrock@verizon.net](mailto:ncschrock@verizon.net)).

