

# THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

**Newsletter**



**March 2019**

## **The Sleigh Issue**

Come March our ancestors had probably pretty much had it with winter. The novelty, joy and good cheer associated with “over the river and through the woods . . . .” had no doubt begun to wear thin. Having to hitch the horses to the sleigh, prepare the foot warmer (Francestown soapstone to the rescue) and bundle everyone up to go somewhere was tiresome. March allowed them to see the light at the end of the tunnel and was hopefully the last month they would have to rely on the sleigh for getting about.

At the Francestown Heritage Museum you will find several sleighs of different design and purpose.

**~ 1870    ICONIC NEW ENGLAND SLEIGH**



So often pictured being drawn through the snow with the riders under a bearskin blanket.

This design is sometimes referred to as a “Cutter” type sleigh. “Over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house we go. . . .”

The exact provenance of this sleigh is not known but a relatively local source of such sleighs was South Ryegate, VT where they were made by convicts in the prison. The photo below shows the Ryegate name as sometimes stenciled on the seat bottom of a sleigh.



**~ 1860    RUNABOUT SLEIGH**



These sleighs were often referred to as delivery or run-about type sleighs. They were versatile and had many uses around the farm. The size of the runners was an indication of whether it was light, medium or heavy duty. These sleighs were the then version of the modern day station wagon – an all-round vehicle with many uses. They were also useful for lengthier trips as hay could be piled in the back providing additional seating (the modern day hay ride) and if the trip was to be an extended one, some of the hay could be used to feed the horses.

While the exact provenance of this sleigh is unknown it is believed to have been made in Keene, NH by the French Carriage Co. or Tottigham Carriage Factory. These companies manufactured the popular “Keene Sleigh” and were producing some 400 annually in the 1860’s. They continued doing so until ~1910 when a dramatic development in the transportation industry, the automobile, brought an end to the French Carriage Co.

~ 1800'S CUTTER SLEIGH



This is a variation of the "Cutter" sleigh design having straight sides and a smooth curve from the top back down to the foot area. While it is essentially a cutter type it seems to incorporate features typical of both the Canadian and Rhode Island sleigh designs.

A distinguishing feature of this sleigh is that one of the side shafts is moveable and can be rotated independently up and out of the way. This greatly facilitated the hitching up of the horse.

The cutter was introduced in the United States in about 1800. It usually had a single seat that held two people and some had a child's seat that folded out when needed.

~1870 BOB-RUNNER HEARSE



This is what is known as a Bob-runner type Sleigh, or sometimes called a bob sleigh. This type sleigh was primarily the workhorse of the sleighs, and was used for many chores on the farm, from hauling hay, buckets, milk cans and bushels to crates of goods. It is easily recognizable because rather than one continuous runner, it had two sets of runners, making it easier to turn.

The design of this type sleigh was highly suitable for adaptation as a hearse to be used in winter. This winter hearse was built ~1870 and was restored with funds provided by the Francetown Improvement and Historical Society. The four wooden runners have metal strips along the bottom to prolong the life of the runners and prevent wear. The coffin slid in and out on rollers and the hearse floor elevated to prevent sliding.

A sleigh ride was also not always the tranquil and serene event that folks think of. Take these examples:

#### - DELIVERY SLEIGH RUNAWAY

**ASPEN, CO, Dec. 26 1896**---- Ackerman's delivery sleigh was badly smashed up yesterday morning about 8:30 o'clock, caused by the running away of the horse attached thereto. The animal took fright at some small boys who were dragging a Christmas tree in front of the store on the corner of Mill and Hopkins, and dashed madly down the street and then turned and ran towards Hook's ranch down the mesa, where he was caught by a young lad named George Sullivan and brought back. The horse is badly injured and will probably have to be shot.

- **GIRL STOPS SLEIGH RUNAWAY**

**NEW YORK, NY, Feb. 28 1907**----Miss Adelaide Downing, daughter of a contractor living at 460 Barnes Avenue, the Bronx, was walking down the Boston Hill road at 179th street at dusk to-night, when she saw a runaway horse with an empty sleigh careening behind dashing over the brow of a hill. Below her fifty boys and girls were coasting, unconscious of any danger.

Realizing that if the runaway were not stopped before he reached the youthful merry-makers he would trample the coasters under foot, the young woman leaped from the sidewalk into the road and awaited the animal. When the horse came up to her Miss Downing jumped and caught the bridle rein. Exerting her strength to the utmost the courageous girl dragged the animal to the unoccupied side of the road and it dashed past the children without touching one.

- **FAMILY OF FIVE PERSONS KILLED AND FATALY INJURED IN SLEIGH ACCIDENT.**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA, February 20, 1907** ---- A special from Muncy Valley says JOSEPH HABEREKER, aged forty, his wife, thirty eight, and three children, MARY, HENRY and MILLIE, aged respectively fifteen, twelve and eight, went sleighing in a large two-horse sleigh last evening. On their way home, about ten o'clock, the horses took fright and ran away. The sleigh was over-turned and the occupants dragged five hundred feet, when the horses fell. The father's neck was broken, and the child HENRY had both legs cut off and died shortly. The wife and remaining children are thought to be fatally injured.

- **TRAIN HITS SLEIGH AND VERMONT MAN'S WIFE WAS KILLED.**

**ST. JOHNSBURY, Vt., Feb. 21, 1905**----While Jonathan Ross was driving with his wife this afternoon their sleigh was struck by a train on the St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad and Mrs. Ross was killed. Mr. Ross was severely injured.

The accident occurred at Gould's Crossing, about two miles from East St. Johnsbury. The horse which Mr. Ross was driving became frightened at the approach of a west-bound train and dashed between two of its cars. The sleigh was demolished, and Mr. and Mrs. Ross were hurled many feet away. Mrs. Ross was instantly killed and Mr. Ross was rendered unconscious. The train was stopped as quickly as possible, and the victims were brought here in the caboose.

A hasty examination by physicians showed that Mr. Ross had suffered a broken hip. As he is over eighty years old, it was feared that this injury, together with the shock, will prove fatal.

And to think – those were “the good old days”.

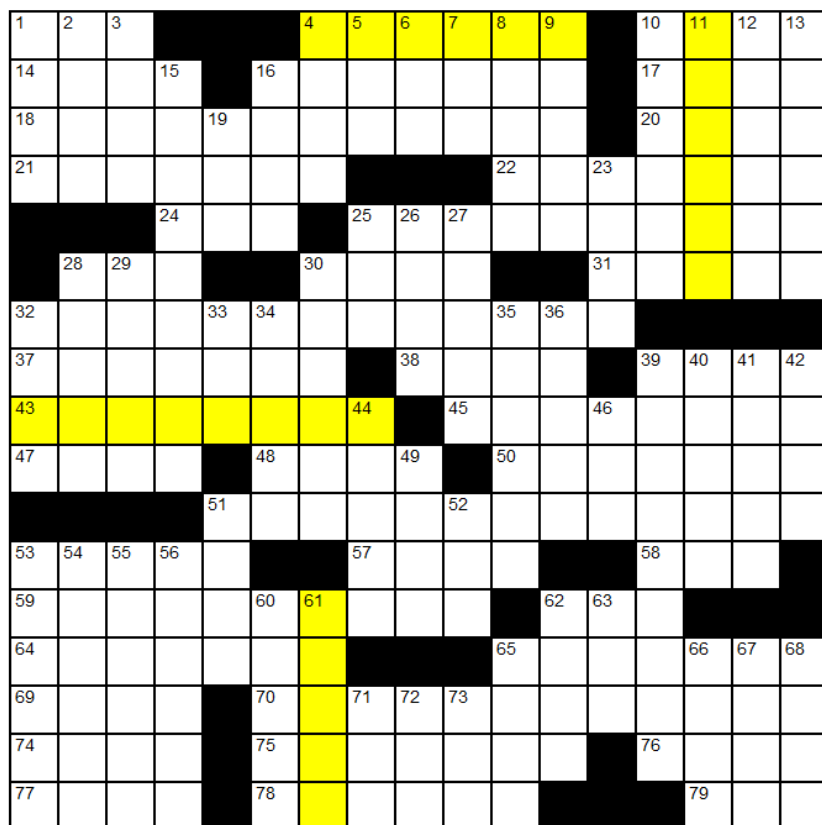
We would like to thank Bill Engel the owner of Denver Sleigh Works for providing some of the information contained in this newsletter. To see over 300 different types and styles of sleighs go to his web site at <http://www.sleighworks.com/photos.html>. Bill and his wife Linda are “saviors of sleighs” and they buy, rent, lease, repair, refurbish and sometimes sell sleighs.



SOLUTION TO THIS MONTHS PUZZLE

# MARCH THEME CROSSWORD

(Yellow blocks contain the theme words)



## ACROSS

1. Moo goo gai pan pan
4. This issue of the newsletter
10. Heroin, slang
14. Asian nurse
16. A native American tribe of Oklahoma
17. Yorkshire river
18. Light, entertaining compositions
20. "Beetle Bailey" dog
21. Relating to Italy
22. Ran at a moderate pace
24. Account
25. Earth's atmosphere at 30-50 miles altitude
28. \_\_\_ Beta Kappa
30. Religious rite
31. Graceful fliers
32. Unintentionally contrary to another purpose
37. A musical stringed instrument
38. Open wide
39. Blood's partner
43. Girl who save sledders from a runaway sleigh

45. An adolescent
47. Bank
48. Farm call
50. Causing laughter
51. Prophylactic curatives
53. Most suitable
57. Wallet contents
58. Handful
59. Constituent of hardened steel
62. \_\_\_ Day
64. Exodus figure
65. Tenets
69. "... or \_\_\_!"
70. In a way that makes you feel ill
74. Fizzles out
75. An outrage
76. Eccentric person
77. "\_\_\_ of Eden"
78. Kidney inflictions
79. "Hold on a \_\_\_!"

## DOWN

1. Dry riverbed
2. Bypass
3. Narcotic sedative (Polynesian) drink
4. Climb
5. On the run
6. Rams mate
7. Setting for TV's "Newhart"
8. Affect
9. They get what's coming to them
10. Mollify
11. A style of sleigh
12. Back
13. Crystal lined cavity in a rock
15. In a fiendish manner
16. Alone
19. "Flying Down to \_\_\_"
23. Chooses, with "for"
25. Fold, spindle or mutilate
26. Catch a glimpse of
27. Brown ermine
28. "The possession of fools": Herodotus
29. Monopoly purchase
30. A christian fundamentalist
32. Alexander, e.g.
33. Caribbean, e.g.
34. Former
35. Gym wear
36. Therapeutic evacuation of the bowels
39. Converting into a gas
40. Pointed arch
41. Extend, in a way
42. Units of work
44. Stanza concluding a poem
46. Cashew, e.g.
49. Clark of the Daily Planet
51. "Guilty," e.g.
52. Born, in bios
53. Hold back
54. Showy bloom
55. Removes
56. Dead
60. Taboos
61. Poles by which a horse pulls a sleigh
62. Allocate, with "out"
63. "Aladdin" prince
65. Low in pitch
66. Freudian topics
67. Arctic sight
68. Harmony
71. Alien craft
72. Clinton, e.g.: Abbr.
73. Chemical ending