

The Historical Herald

The Quarterly Newsletter of



The Bartlett Snow Roller—Restored 2015

PO Box 514

Bartlett, NH 03812

www.BartlettHistory.org

Fall 2023 Edition (2023:4)

The Bartlett

Historical Society

The Campaign Continues...Thank You For Your Continued Support

The generosity of 570 donors, many giving often, to our museum project is a story in itself. We cannot say thank you enough for all of this support. And, while we say thank you, we also ask for your continued support as we start down the home stretch of the project. Yes, we have made great progress, and that progress is a result of many donors offering their support, but we can't let up until we have been successful in our renovation effort. As we approach the end of 2023, if you are considering year-end donations, please keep BHS and our museum project in mind. The sooner we can complete the renovation work, the sooner we'll have the museum open for all to enjoy.



We have included another museum supplement in this newsletter to tell of the many significant steps forward we've taken over the past three months. All of this work has added to the "WOW" factor that we hear when people enter the building. There are, however, three highlights that deserve special mention. First, our stained-glass window lightboxes are now in place around the building. They cast a beautiful golden color in the room. Second, our four chandeliers are now hanging above our future display area. They add an incredible touch of class to the room. Third, something you can't see but you will feel is that our heating (and cooling) system is now operable. The winter of 2023 – 2024 will be the first time in 24 years that our building will be warm in the winter. With these accomplishments and many more, we are that much closer to the opening of the museum, but we still have several tasks to go to declare victory.

Our next tasks include the major work to install of the interior wood trim in the building. This is very detailed work that will be done by our General Contractor, Bill Duggan. We are also going to install the new back stairs to the building and restart our painting projects. We have been the recipients of a very generous donation of plank flooring from a BHS member in Massachusetts. This flooring will be installed in our foyer, back exit area, lavatory and Curator's Workspace. This donation is saving us a considerable expense in the renovation. We are also preparing the original 1890 floor in the future display area to apply a coat of floor paint. At one time the floor was painted so we are keeping that original touch. This money saving donation came from another generous BHS member. Member support is greatly appreciated.

Campaign Update: To date, with the generous donations of 570 individuals, foundations, and businesses, many having made multiple donations, we have raised \$527,021 out of the recently revised \$597,000 campaign goal! Project expenses to date are about \$462,169; of that total, \$429,366 in real capital value has been added to the building. We are estimating that we need to raise \$80,000 to complete Phase 2 and open the museum. We are and will continue to stretch every donated dollar as far as possible to complete the renovation. *How can you help get us to this goal? First, any donation you can make to the project is greatly appreciated. Second, if you know of anyone who is interested in adding their name to our growing list of donors, please contact Phil Franklin, at Phil@BartlettHistory.org. Thank you.*

Museum Donors: 07/09/2023—09/22/2023

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President's Message

With fall now upon us, it seems like yesterday that we were just welcoming in the new year. Our pace of activity here at the Bartlett Historical Society has continued in the fast lane with our museum project, the wrap up of 2023 activities, and plans for 2024 being discussed.

Our Bartlett History Museum project continues to be our top priority. We have made significant progress on the building and put several more renovation tasks in the "Completed" column. I've included another museum supplement with this newsletter to update everyone on our progress. While we are making great progress, we still have several things to complete before we can open the museum doors. We only schedule work as we have the funds available to do the work. If you are considering a year-end donation, please keep BHS and our museum project in mind. We truly appreciate your support and look forward to welcoming you into our/your museum.

As we approach the end of each year, the BHS Board of Directors goes through a planning process for the coming year. We have lined up four different and interesting speakers for our Quarterly Presentation Series, we are thinking about some additional fundraising opportunities, and we are starting to discuss how we will operate the museum. We are also looking at things such as historical research projects, getting our 2024 BHS Membership Drive underway, and how we can be a more effective part of our community. We have a lot of things in the works and your ongoing support helps us keep BHS doing interesting things for our members, donors, and the greater community. We thank you for your support.

In every newsletter, we try to present the story of an interesting person or persons and this edition is no exception. It was my great pleasure to have a conversation with Rob and Marion Owen from Bartlett. Their story is quite unique and one that I hope you enjoy.

Speaking of stories, in 2024, we are going to launch an effort to get the stories of anyone, locally or from away, who in any way was a part of our St. Joseph Church. To get you thinking, we're looking to tell the story of St. Joseph Church through the people who were a part of the church – the people make the history. We'll have more on this next year but in the meantime, please give some thought to your connection with the former church.

Finally, on behalf of our BHS Board of Directors and myself, I would like to thank everyone for their continued support of BHS and our museum project. If you have any questions, comments or ideas about BHS or Bartlett, Hart's Location or Livermore history, please let me know by dropping me an email at Phil@BartlettHistory.org. Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Phil Franklin

President, Bartlett Historical Society
Phil@BartlettHistory.org

A color version of this newsletter is available on our website at www.BartlettHistory.org

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Photos Tell the Stories

Recently, we received two very interesting, historically significant photos of Bartlett sites. Both sites still exist in Bartlett today; both look quite different. These images give us a look to the later part of the 1800s.



Bartlett was a central hub for railroads in the area. This image (L) shows the Bartlett Roundhouse, built in 1873. This photo, from Scotty Mallett's collection, is dated between 1875 and 1888. Notice the turn table and six engine bays. Today, the turn table is gone and there are only four bays on the building. With Scotty's help, this building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Bartlett was also an agricultural town with several operating farms. Below is a photo of the Cave Mountain Farm sent to us by Cynthia Otis Lindemeyer. Her grandmother, Sara Effie Stanton Otis, lived on this farm. Cave Mountain Farm was originally owned by Jonas Stanton. Other Stanton family farms, owned by Woodbury Stanton and William Stanton, were on today's Stanton Farm Road. Cave Mountain Farm was located on Cobb Farm Road, once known as 2nd Iron Road.



The farm house still exists. It has been moved back from the road 100 or so feet and is currently being remodeled. The small barn in the middle still stands on its original site. The dairy barn is gone. This photo is from the late 1800s.

100 Years Ago ...

In the 1923, the town of Bartlett paid Livermore Mills \$120.50 for lumber for highway maintenance (this was near the end of the Livermore operation)

The Bartlett Village Fire Precinct received \$1,200 from the Maine Central Railroad in payment for water for their MCRR steam engines

Tuition for Hart's Location students from 1920 -1921 in the amount of \$116.79 appeared in the 1923 Town of Bartlett Annual Report.



Drawings By:
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Greta's phone # 603 738 4958

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2023 BHS Quilt Raffle—LAST CALL!!

The drawing date for 2023 Quilt Raffle is Wednesday, October 18, 2023, at our final 2023 Quarterly Presentation Series event (the winner does not need to be present). Tickets will be available at the door before the presentation starts or as noted below until October 15th. (see our BHS website at www.BartlettHistory.org for a color photo).

Tickets are: 1 for \$5.00 5 for \$20.00 15 for \$50.00.

Our 2023 Quilt Raffle tickets are available by:

- ⇒ Purchasing them via our BHS website and using your credit card
- ⇒ Sending in a ticket request to BHS, Quilt Raffle, PO Box 514, Bartlett, NH 03812; Please include the number of tickets you'd like to purchase and a check or credit card information for those tickets; We'll mail the ticket stubs back to you at your return address

All proceeds from the raffle will be directed to the BHS Museum Fund. Questions on the quilt can be directed to Sue at the email address BHSTreasurer1890@Gmail.com. We thank you for your support.



Would you like your BHS Newsletter by Email or our paper style?

Recently, several members and donors have requested that we email our newsletter to them. So, we're extending this offer to everyone. If you would like to receive your BHS newsletter via your email, please let us know by dropping us an email at BartlettHistoryNH@gmail.com and we'll add you to our "Newsletter Email Distribution List." However, if you don't have email or want to keep receiving the newsletter in paper/hardcopy format, we'll keep mailing it to you via the US Postal Service.



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How Can You Donate to BHS?

There are several options:

Cash or Check; Credit Card; Gift-in-Kind; Stock Transfer, Matching Gift from your employer, Memorials, Estate Designations

Donations to BHS that are designated to the Museum Fund or those that are undesignated are currently funneled to the Museum Fund. Donations designated to the General Fund are directed to our operating fund.

All donations are greatly appreciated and we thank you for your continued support.

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Rob and Marion Owen

Clowning Around

by Phil Franklin

Our Mount Washington Valley is filled with people who have very interesting and unique backgrounds. On the evening of August 30, 2023, I had the great pleasure of talking with two such people. Rob and Marion Owen along with their little dog, Lilla Du (Swedish for “Little One”) spent a couple of hours with me in our future museum building telling me their story. They are professional entertainers, more specifically, professional clowns.



Rob and Marion have lived in the Valley for the past three decades. Before settling here, they spent a great deal of time performing with different circuses and stage shows across our nation and in Canada. Rob’s family roots are in Coos County while Marion hails from central Wisconsin. Story Land would eventually bring them to this Valley.

Introducing Rob, the Performer

Rob was born on October 1, 1949, in West Stewartstown, NH on the third floor of the Coos County Farm building. In 1949 that building served as the hospital for Coos County. He grew up in his family home on Bridge Street in Colebrook, NH with his parents, Edmund and Marion Owen and his older sister, Sally. Before anyone thinks I made a mistake with the “Marions” in this story, his mother was Marion G. Owen; his wife is Marion A. Owen. His mother was born in Manchester, NH but in the 1930s, her parents moved to Conway where his grandmother oversaw the building and operation of the Pine Hill Cabins (located by the current site of Banner’s Restaurant on Route 16).

Rob spoke proudly of his grandfathers and his hometown. He mentioned that as a young boy, he would watch the trains pass through Colebrook not far from his house. His paternal grandfather worked as a rural mail carrier and a chauffeur at the Balsam’s Resort in Dixville Notch. One day, he accompanied Rob and his sister on their first train ride, albeit a short one, from Colebrook north to Beecher Falls. Still, it was an exciting journey for a young boy, and he later realized that this was his first connection with Bartlett as those trains traveled from the railyard in Bartlett. His maternal grandfather was a conductor on the Boston & Maine Railroad working out of Boston and eventually transferred to the North Conway branch of the railroad – another connection to his eventual home as an adult.

Rob attended school in Colebrook, graduating from Colebrook Academy. From there, he attended the University of New Hampshire starting in the study of mechanical engineering with plans to become an aeronautical engineer. As a freshman, he enlisted in the Air Force ROTC program. However, during his freshman year, Rob made a very big decision and changed his major to the theater program. Following his graduation from college, he fulfilled his military obligation serving as a Missile Launch Officer in Grand Forks, North Dakota. From 1971 to 1975, he was one of the men who spent a good portion of their service time in a command capsule 50’ underground with the missile launch controls and protocols for a Minute Man Missile at his fingertips.

Rob entered the world of clowning while still serving in the Air Force. In college, keeping with his interest in performing, he had done several shows to entertain children. In 1975, he started traveling to circuses that were in the area where he was stationed, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles to see a show. He was a natural self-taught clown. He learned the art of clowning by reading various trade magazines, attending clown conventions, and getting involved with the Clowns of America organization. His commanding officer in the Air Force, himself a member of the Shriner’s Clown Unit, encouraged Rob to follow his passion. Through his colonel, he was first introduced to the art of making balloon animals and from that introduction did his own self-study to advance his skills. He also learned the art of magic and illusion. He continued to advance his clowning skills through his connection with local (NH) WMUR TV children’s show personality, Ring-a-Ding the

... continued on next page

Rob and Marion Owen continued ...

Clown (Dwight Damon). This program aired in the 1960s and 1970s. Rob's original clown name was "Spiffindiferus" but realizing that this name would be too long for a circus act, he shortened it to "Spiff." In 1975, he joined the Hunt Brothers Circus as a rookie, or "First of May" clown (First of May is the name assigned to first year clowns because the circus season starts on May 1st; Rob happened to be a First of May Clown who started on May 1st).

Clown Terminology

Before we go further, we should define a couple of "clown roles." There are two types of clowns in the circus. The "Producing Clown" creates special costumes and props and directs the "Alley Clowns" in the routines that are presented in the center ring. The Alley clowns have their own costumes and makeup. They often have solo routines such as juggling and acrobatics. Some Producing Clowns hog the spotlight, and the Alley clowns are just "pointers" directing attention of the audience to the Producer Clown.

Introducing Marion, the Performer

Marion Annette Serns, the future Marion Owen, was born in Beloit, Wisconsin in 1955. She had an older brother and younger sister. Her parents served in the military, her father in the Army Air Core, and mother in the Navy. When they married, they settled in Wisconsin and were discharged from the service. She said that her parents enjoyed taking their family camping and going to different parades, zoos, and attractions. Her father enjoyed attending circuses and would take the family along for the entertainment. He even dressed as a clown on Halloween and entertained people as they went trick-or-treating to different houses in their neighborhood yelling "Trick or Treat, Whiskey or Beer" at each front door.

Marion's father was a Wood Pattern Worker specializing in the fabrication of aircraft parts. She explained that to make a part her father would mill a wooden part to exact specifications. The wooden part would then be put through a process where it is used to form a metal casting and then the casting is used to mass produce that exact part. She told of how her father once took her to an airshow where he showed her an aircraft engine with a wooden propeller. Pointing to the propeller, he told her that he made them. It wasn't until years later that she came to appreciate the mathematics and precision that was needed to do that type of work.

Marion described herself as a "good tomboy" growing up, always active. One story she told was when she was about two-and one-half years old, she escaped the confines of their yard by climbing over a fence. She proudly said that her brother couldn't climb the fence even though he was older than her. Family life in the Serns household was less than ideal though and Marion's parents would eventually separate. Marion and her sister lived with her mother in Stevens Point, WI and her brother lived with their father in Illinois. Stevens Point is near Green Bay and when asked if she is a Packers fan, she said "yes" adding that it gets a bit tough when the Packers and Patriots play each other as Rob and their boys are Pats fans.

Living in Stevens Point, her mother opened a dry-cleaning store. One day, she announced that she wanted to raise miniature schnauzers but would need the help of her daughters to do this. Both agreed, so at about 12 years old, Marion was now learning about raising puppies. For her birthday one year, she was given the pick of the litter and proceeded to train the dog. At a competition her dog took first place, and at 14 years old, she agreed to continue training the dog. This was the start of her lifelong enjoyment of animals.

One of the things she enjoyed doing with her father was clowning. She said that when he left, she continued to dress in her clown costume to go trick-or-treating, but, while people thought she was cute in her outfit, no one was laughing anymore as they did when her father performed for the neighbors. As a result, she stopped going out on Halloween. She never lost the excitement of being a clown, however. In another story, she said that while a student at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, she was invited to a Halloween party. Naturally, she went as a clown. She enjoyed doing pantomime in her clown persona so at the party, she didn't talk to anyone but communicated through miming. Aside from her studies in the theater program, she became very active in the outing club doing such things as cross-country skiing, rock and ice climbing, and parachuting.

Marion's interest in clowning grew and, like Rob, she taught herself the art of clowning. She read the book "How to be a Clown." She started doing birthday parties for kids as "Sam the Clown" ("Sam" came from her maiden name initials backwards). She joined the organization Clowns of America. She went to the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, WI. This museum is located on the site of the farm where the Ringling brothers grew up. While there, she saw Jimmy Williams, the famous "Happy the Clown."

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Rob and Marion Owen continued ...

He was inside the circus ring, and she was a visitor outside the ring. They made eye contact and she started to do a bit of miming. He responded by playing along and blowing a “bird whistle” that made all different sounds in the hands of an expert. He motioned her to come into the ring but as she did, he blew what sounded like a police whistle. Not knowing if she was in trouble or not and still in character, she jumped out only to realize that Happy was tricking her. After this impromptu session, they talked and he invited her back to learn some simple magic tricks, slight of hand tricks, juggling, and one-person skits (she said she already knew how to ride a unicycle).



Happy the
Clown

Marion took an opportunity to attend the 1980 Clowns of America Convention in Denver, CO. Prior to the convention, she had an idea in a dream for a clown gag where she would appear to be riding on the shoulders of another clown. With the help of her mother, she made the costume and named her cloth partner “PeeDee the Clown.” At the convention, she entered a contest for “White Face Clowning.” Her humorous skit involved a demonstration of skills such as balance and appearing to almost fall, mime and puppetry. She was proud to say that she, with PeeDee, took first place in the White Face Clowning Competition.

Unsure of where to go next but enjoying Colorado, she took a job in the summer of 1980 as a lumberjack in Grand Junction on the Piñon Mesa cutting Ponderosa Pine. While this job was interesting, it wasn’t her future. She wanted to be a clown and, along with that, see more of the USA.

The worlds of Rob and Marion were starting to come together but they didn’t know it. A possible first common point was that they both saw or met a mime named Demitri, a protégée of the famous French mime, Marcel Marceau. Marion was fortunate to be able to see him preparing for his performance backstage while she was a graphic artist for her college newspaper. Rob saw him perform at an International Mime Festival. Rob wrote a review of Demitri’s performance that would be published in the Clowns of America magazine and eventually be used by Demitri for a US Tour.

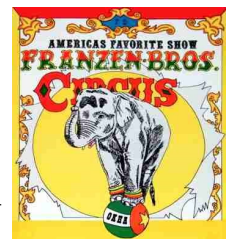


Wayne
Franzen

Searching for more adventure, Marion connected with Jimmy Williams again. He advised her to contact Wayne Franzen, the owner of Franzen Brother Circus. In 1981, after a telephone interview, Franzen hired her in a support role. One of her roles was being an Alley clown selling concessions in the stands while in costume. The Producing clown would occasionally call on Sam (Marion).

Quickly jumping into character during our interview, Sam did the “3 Tied Scarves” skit for me (one that she did for audiences) only with no props. This was a skit she developed with Happy the Clown. Quickly, Sam says she has three scarves and engaging the audience while putting the scarves in a bag, she tells them they’ll come out tied. Her first “attempt” doesn’t work so she puts the scarves back in the bag and asks the audience to yell louder for her, they do, and she looks in the bag and says in her Sam voice, “They’re Tide,” and pulls out a box of Tide detergent. Over time, Sam received more laughs than the Producing clown, so he stopped calling on her.

While with Franzen, Marion learned how to drive a truck pulling a trailer. In the circus you wear many different hats. Her trailer transported the big cats in the show. Franzen shows were famous for big animals, lions, tigers, elephants and the like. Once, stopping at a gas station for fuel, a bystander observed Marion petting the nose of a tiger named Tony. Tony was purring for her as he enjoyed the attention. While Marion paid for the fuel, a bystander went over to the trailer to pet Tony. That person got a much different reaction from the tiger as Tony lunged at the bars of his trailer with a classic tiger roar scaring the visitor. Marion saw what happened and casually said to the person, “Don’t get too close,” got in her truck and drove off. Marion said that she was able to work with the big animals, offering another story of how she helped calm Annie the Lion when she needed treatment from the veterinarian. It was ironic that Marion landed in the Franzen Circus because she and Wayne Franzen had met in a previous life, so to speak. While Marion was a student at Stevens Point High School, Wayne was a teacher there. She said that he looked so young at the time, she thought he was a student. Now, with gray hair and being in an unexpected place, they realized their paths had crossed several years before.



Returning to Rob’s story – Rob started performing at the Hunt Brothers Circus in 1975. After completing a season on that show, he came back to New Hampshire and got involved in the building of Heritage, NH, with Stoney and Bob Morrell in 1976. With most of the building of Heritage, NH complete, and only detailed finish work to be done, Rob went back to the Hunt Brothers Circus as the Assistant Manager. In this role, Rob said he admittedly took on more jobs than he could handle

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Rob and Marion Owen continued ...

so, being a bit overwhelmed, left the show after a year and a half. He then joined the Sells and Gray Circus in New York, performing in a variety of states, ending up in the mid-west. On that circus, Rob oversaw putting up the side show attraction, he performed as a clown and took over as the Ring Master.

While Sells and Gray was in Ohio, John Strong attended the show one evening. He connected with Rob and offered Rob a job at the Big John Strong Circus in California, but Rob stayed with Sells and Gray. In the summer of 1978, Rob joined a stage magic show and during a two-week break, he did some clowning at the Kalispell Montana Fair. In 1979 and 1980, he clowning on the American Continental Circus which produced shows for the Shrine Circus performing in the Shrine Auditorium and Las Vegas Colosseum.

John Strong Circus, Rob & Marion Meet

Again, working for Sells and Gray, John Strong was still interested in having Rob join his circus so in 1981, Rob moved on to the Big John Strong Circus. On the Internet, I (Phil, your author) found a YouTube video produced by a gentleman named Phil Kavanaugh (also known as Flippo the Clown who clowning and juggled). He was also a member of the Strong Circus. In that video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IcIL7A_Kgo), we see images of Rob in his clown costume on stilts where Kavanaugh points him out saying that Rob is “one of the best clowns working in America today.” The worlds of Rob and Marion are now drawing much closer as Marion was a cast member of the Strong Circus as well. While not a couple at this point, they said they worked well together.

Over the winter of 1980, Marion received a call from John Strong. Strong was looking for one more clown to work in the ring with the Producing clown. Performers from the Franzen show had recommended that Strong call Marion and she accepted his offer. She performed on the show and helped in all areas of show operations. In mid-summer, the circus’s advance publicity crew, including Marion, left to promote the show while waiting for a new advance clown to arrive from the east coast. She was sent to Redmund, OR to publicize the upcoming circus and Rob, the new advance clown, met her there. They were armed with a stack of blank signed checks, free children’s tickets, and posters. When purchasing newspaper or radio spots to advertise the circus, they would simply fill in the amount on the check needed for the advertising. Rob added that while it was very surprising to be trusted with blank signed checks, “They were very honest.” Later, Marion was sent to Washington state to pick up a truck and drive it to Philipsburg, Montana where she would reconnect with Rob. Along the way, she went through Browning, MT, the center of the Blackfeet Native American Nation. In Browning, her truck broke down. She was helped by one of the members of the Blackfeet Tribe; he moved her truck to a safe place for the night. Days later, she was back in Browning in costume doing publicity for the show. She, unexpectedly, ran into the same man. As a thank you for his help, she gave him tickets for his family to see the show – he said he needed 25 tickets for his entire family.

While doing advance publicity, Rob taught Marion how to walk on four-foot-tall stilts. Mastering the skills of stilt walking within a couple of weeks, she went on publicity activities in full costume on stilts. She said getting into and out of buildings was a challenge as the doors are made for “normal” ... continued on next page



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Rob and Marion Owen continued ...

sized people, not ten-foot-tall clowns. When in an office, she said they would casually walk over to a filing cabinet and sit down on top of it while they conducted their business.

After the regular season shows were done, Rob was the Producing clown of the Strong Circus while Marion worked as an Alley clown. Together they performed on a special Christmas date. Marion noted that while Rob had the spotlight, he made sure that everyone got the laughs. This made an impression on her. While doing the show in Scottsdale, Arizona, Marion gave her mother a plane ticket to visit her and see the show. It also gave her mother a chance to visit her other daughter who lived in Apachee Junction, Arizona. Rob was heading off to do a touring stage show for Strong. To help ease Marion's concerns about where her mother would stay while visiting, he left his camper for Marion's mother to use while he was on tour.

Marion Meets Marion, Marriage, Introducing Gustav

After the stage shows, Rob asked Marion to join him on a trip back to Colebrook and Rob's family home. Here, they would do clown shows during the off season. After traveling for several days, they arrived in Colebrook in the wee morning hours to be greeted by Rob's mother who came flying out of the house in her bathrobe to give Marion a big hug. Marion said she wasn't expecting this type of greeting from a woman she was just meeting for the first time and in the middle of the night. With Rob's family, she experienced a very different family lifestyle from the family atmosphere she remembered growing up. She enjoyed this casual family experience, adding that she and Rob were constantly kidding each other with a stream of puns and jokes. While in Colebrook, Rob and Marion worked on developing different skits, including one called "Shoot Out." For this skit, Marion made them cowboy costumes and used Rob's grandmother to model the outfits with a lot of laughter.

While in Colebrook, Rob and Marion were hired by the Kiwanis Club of Newport, VT to do two shows. They made all their costumes, developed their skits, and entertained the audiences, making \$1,200 in one day! After another call from John Strong, they were off to Ohio to perform two shows that would help settle a court case on how many tickets a show could oversell for an event (it was common practice to sell more tickets than seats available). Because this show was related to a court case, Rob said they were able to work in a little satire at the expense of the prosecution and defense attorneys – a little bonus for being clowns. Working as Spiff and Sam, they unknowingly were auditioning before several show owners who were in the audience. After the shows, different owners gave them their cards and offered jobs to perform on their shows.

On the way back to Colebrook, Rob proposed marriage to Marion. Stunned, she said she needed to think about it because she was not prepared to settle down and raise a family. Three days later, she said "Yes" and without further ado, Rob announced their engagement to his family. They were married in November 1983.

In 1984, Marion's mother joined them as a part of their travels with the John Strong Circus and ended up working for the Strong Circus mending costumes and selling tickets. Both Rob and Marion agree that many "good memories" came from that road trip.


Also, in 1984, Rob and Marion, Spiff and Sam, did a variety of different shows including a three-week stint with the Carden International Circus. From those performances, they were hired for the 1985 season. After the three-week Carden tour, they traveled with Canada's Super Circus where they performed in the Maritime Provinces including Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island where

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Rob and Marion Owen continued ...

Marion got her first taste of lobster. And, found she was pregnant with their first child while traveling on this tour.

In 1986, Rob and Marion were blessed with their first son, Gustav Earle Owen. Gus was named after one of Marion's grandfathers. Gus' middle name, Earle, is a tribute to an Owen family naming tradition. As a young boy, Gus took to the stage with his parents and became a little performer. Gus did his first show at the age of two in Texas. He mimicked his father as he stood between his parents. Audience members thought he was a midget at first. After one show, Marion took Gus off for some popcorn. While doing this, Gus, for some reason, poked the belt buckle of one of the men by the popcorn stand and, to Gus' surprise, it popped open. From there, to the amusement of many, he went around poking belt buckles and enjoyed getting the laughs.

Returning to Bartlett, Story Land, Performing, Raising a Family

While performing for the Carden show for three years, Rob and Marion continued doing stage shows during the off season. At one of their shows in Colebrook, Bob and Stoney Morrell were in the audience. After the show, the Morrell's offered the Owen's a two-year contract to perform at Story Land. However, by the time they decided to accept the offer, another magic act was booked but the Morrell's still found places for Rob and Marion in the Story Land family. Rob worked on ride maintenance while Marion worked in the art department (introducing 3-D painting to the scene), she started face painting for the guests, and made costumes for the characters. In 1989, they bought a house in Bartlett. Three years after joining Story Land, they had their own clown and magic show.



Their second son, Gerald Gustav Owen, was born in 1990. According to Marion, Gus started asking if he was ever going to have a little brother or sister. At the time, she happened to be pregnant. When it was time for the baby to be delivered, Gus came along to the hospital. To ease the tension for everyone, he told jokes and performed for everyone. His parents told him that he could name the new baby so he came up with a name but didn't tell his parents what it would be. He told his preschool teachers he was going to name the baby after himself. Leading up to the birth, Rob has been telling Gus stories about people who were important to him (Rob) in his life. One of the people Rob spoke of was his grandfather, Gerald. When his new brother arrived, Gus announced that he was to be named Gerald Gustav Owen – he honored his great grandfather and himself! Gerald's nickname would be Ged. Peering into the hospital bassinet, Gus told his mother "We sure got a cutie."

Ged was on stage at the age of two at Story Land helping his parents with their magic act. In one routine, a child from the audience participates by laying on a board supported by two chairs, one of the chairs is removed and the person still stays suspended in air by one chair. Wanting to be a part of the act, Ged went to the front of the act and lifted the curtain that was hiding a thin post holding up the chairless end of the platform. While he gave away the illusion of floating, his innocence in revealing the secret was priceless.

Gus and Ged would go on to perform in plays at the Josiah Bartlett Elementary School (JBES) under the direction of Peg Fish and Sue Chula. Their annual shows included the Wizard of Oz where Gus was the mayor of the Munchkins, and Peter Pan among many others. Marion helped with set designs and props.

At a higher level of stage performing, Rob took Gus to see The Music Man play at the Eastern Slope Playhouse (now the M&D Playhouse). This sparked a desire in Gus to perform at the playhouse.

Eventually both Gus and Ged were members of the Mount Washington Valley Theater Company performing in plays including the King and I, Sound of Music, and Oliver



(Gus was cast as Oliver). Marion helped the boys develop skills needed for their shows such as skipping for Oliver and somersaults for Stop the World, I Want to Get Off.

While growing as young actors, they were also in the Cub Scouts with Marion being the Den Leader for Pack 321 and Boy Scouts where Marion was the Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 150. In the summer when their stage performances coincided with their scouting activities, accommodations were made to participate in both adventures.

What's Happening Today in the Owen Family

Fast forward to the past few years, Rob and Marion are settled in Bartlett. They are still involved in the performance arts. They are also both philanthropically involved in the community promoting and supporting several important causes to help people have better lives. Both of their sons married and are now making lives of their own.

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Rob and Marion Owen continued ...

Rob has been involved in a variety of positions since leaving Story Land in 2009. Over the past few years, he has occasionally performed on the M&D stage but prefers to do improvisational work or work off a script. To that end, he became Santa Claus on the Journey to the North Pole train excursion that is annually sponsored by the Believe in Books organization on a Conway Scenic Railroad train. In December 2021, Rob published a book, *The Great Christmas Bell Tsunami*. This is a story about a master Christmas bell maker at the North Pole, the calamity that occurs when his newly invented bell making machine goes haywire, and the problem solving needed to right the wrong, all leading to a happy ending. In 2021, he signed on with the Conway Scenic Railroad as a narrator on their train rides. In this role, Rob provides an entertaining story of all the sites seen along the train ride – a little history, some current events, and a good deal of humor. Rob's voice is also heard during the safety announcements on the Story Land rides.

Marion maintains a very active lifestyle. Aside from being a freelance artist, she is also a service provider at Northern Human Services in Conway. She continues to enjoy entertaining and does her elf persona at Christmas time. Recently, she attended Santa Camp, joined the New England Santa Claus Society and is a member of the Santa Society of the Valley (along with Rob). At Santa Camp, Marion participated in a talent show where she became her character "Matilda" and right before me in our conversation, she became Matilda offering this author a very animated and amusing skit. At Santa Camp, she said she amazed the audience as Matilda and carried her alter-ego further by staying in character through the rest of the event including at dinner. She and her little canine friend, Lilla Du, are inseparable. While Marion takes on her elf persona, Lilla Du dresses as a reindeer. Lilla Du has been trained as a therapy dog and, along with Marion, visits our local hospital, nursing homes and adult daycare center. Lilla Du helps comfort people who are troubled or in pain. This year, Marion will be performing in the Valley around Christmas time doing short shows that will include some magic and other skits, no doubt with Lilla Du.

Gus Owen now lives in Kittery, Maine with his son and daughter. Like his parents, he still enjoys entertaining people, but he also has a position working in the food service industry and for a company that promotes STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) (now broadened to STEAM – the A is for Arts) educational programs for students. He enjoys speaking different languages and is fluent in Japanese and French.

Ged Owen lives in Rochester, NH where he attended Nazareth College in their musical, theater, and dance program. He is employed by a company that makes countertops and he also still performs on stage. His boss has encouraged him to pursue his passion for performing but full-time employment keeps the bills paid for now. His wife, Jordan, while initially not interested in stage work has become the stage manager for the theater group in which Ged is involved.

... In Closing

As the time approached for the conversation that generated this article, I was excited about meeting Rob and Marion. I anticipated a very different and entertaining conversation. I wasn't in the least bit disappointed. Through this time together, we laughed at stories and learned about two amazing people and their alter-egos. On another level, I saw how deeply they cared for each other and the people around them. I enjoyed being with these two incredible people who want to make the world a better place through their natural talent for entertaining audiences, big and small, getting them to let go of their cares and laugh. I extend my sincere thanks to Rob and Marion for their time in telling their story.

Spiff, Sam & sons in costume, (Left). Spiff and Sam (center & right)





The Bartlett Snow Roller—Restored 2015

The Historical Herald

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Our Final 2023 Presentation

NEW!! Wednesday, October 18, 2023: Hauntings in the Valley and Spirits in Our Former St. Joseph Church Building with Kelly Rogers from Luna Paranormal

Just in time for Halloween! Kelly and her assistant have done many paranormal investigations in the Mount Washington Valley and in our future Bartlett History Museum building. This presentation will talk about their findings. It might be a little spooky but it will be interesting. We will hold the event in our unfinished future Bartlett History Museum building! (Note rest room facilities are not yet available—sorry)

*****Location: The Future Bartlett History Museum, 13 School Street, Bartlett, Time: 7:00 p.m.**

Announcing the 2024 Quarterly Presentation Series!

Sunday, January 7, 2024: The Mammoth Road: NH Folk Tales as an Avenue to Local History & Culture, presented by Erin Moulton, NH Humanities Speaker

Folk Tales are passed from generation to generation, often embellished in the telling. Still, we can often learn about our history from these tales. Erin will tell stories compiled by the NH Women's Federation.

Bartlett Congregational Church Sanctuary, Route 302 and Albany Avenue, Time: 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 17, 2024, Hiking in the White Mountains, presented by Ed Parsons, local hiking enthusiast and Conway Daily Sun columnist

The White Mountains, including our National Forest are covered with hiking trails offering different challenges. Ed will talk about his experiences as he has hiked these trails, offering thoughts on sites and "trail attractions."

Bartlett Congregational Church Sanctuary, Route 302 and Albany Avenue, Time: 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, June 19, 2024: Circus and Stage Performing—Insights from Spiff and Sam, presented by Rob and Marion Owen, Professional Clowns and BHS members

Rob and Marion (Spiff and Sam) will entertain us with the story of how they became circus and stage entertainers, clowning, performing magic, juggling, and inventing skits to let people forget their cares and laugh.

Bartlett Congregational Church Sanctuary, Route 302 and Albany Avenue, Time: 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, October 16, 2024: Yankee Ingenuity: Stories of Headstrong and Resourceful People, presented by Jo Radner

Jo shares a selection of historical tales-humorous and thought-provoking-about New Englanders who have used their wits in extraordinary ways to solve problems and create inventions. The talk will include discussion with the audience, and may introduce a brief folktale or a poem about inventiveness and problem-solving.

Bartlett Congregational Church Sanctuary, Route 302 and Albany Avenue, Time: 7:00 p.m.

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Frankenstein Cliff rises above the fall colors in Hart's Location