

# Barton's Pierce-Barrows Block showcased

Bob Hunt, associate director of operations at the Old Stone House Museum, was happy to team up with Rural Edge Property Manager Theresa Perron to use the resources and collection of the Old Stone House Museum to showcase and celebrate the Pierce-Barrows block that has been a landmark and a continuously operating drug store in the heart of downtown Barton since 1883.

The photos show the building sometime in the 1890s and the initials (B.R.B.) of an unknown workman painted on the attic wall on May 3, 1886. The building was built for Oscar D. Owen and designed by noted Saint Johnsbury architect Lambert Packard. It was constructed on the site of his general store and adjoining drug store, owned by E. F. Dutton, which was destroyed by fire. Mr. Owen hired Wallace Dow of Albany to

build it. H.C. Pierce, E.F. Dutton's clerk and son-in-law agreed to rent part of the building for a drug store.

In 1909 Pierce and Charles A. Barrows purchased the building from the estate of O.D. Owen. Mr. Barrows had previously taken over the O.D. Owen Store in 1903. The Pierce Pharmacy and Barrows Store operated for decades.

Other businesses located in the building included the *Orleans County Monitor*, a weekly newspaper, a milliner, A&P, bakery, sporting goods store, and many others. Currently the building houses the Kinney Pharmacy.

Mr. Hunt and Ms. Perron have set up a changing display in the vacant storefront on the north end of the building. It contains a display of old store stock discovered in the old building, a

buttonhook with O.D. Owen cast on it, as well as a collection of Vermont souvenir china depicting buildings and scenes in Barton, the state of Vermont and bordering towns in Quebec.

Also featured, on an old fashioned whatnot, are china pieces depicting other buildings designed by Lambert Packard. Eventually, the display will feature the original soda fountain bar back that was removed from the Pierce Pharmacy decades ago and was originally installed in 1892. Mannequins dressed in period costumes will also be included as well as an enlargement of an old photograph of the building in its heyday. Keep watching as this pop-up museum continues to evolve. Mr. Hunt, associate director of operations at the Old Stone House Museum. — from Bob Hunt.

# Towns launch NEK Community Broadband

The Northeast Kingdom (NEK) is one step closer to universal high-speed Internet access with the official formation of the region's new Communication Union District (CUD) last month. NEK Community Broadband is a community-led effort to fund and build the infrastructure needed to bring broadband speeds to every residential and business address in its member towns and beyond.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the gaps in the availability of broadband Internet across the NEK. Many families face daily challenges as they try to work, learn, connect with friends and family, and apply for benefits from homes without sufficient connectivity. Only 52 percent of addresses in the region have the ability to purchase what the Federal Communications Commission now considers basic broadband speeds (25Mbps download/3Mbps upload).

"There is so much more awareness now about how critical universal broadband Internet is to our rural communities," said Evan Carlson, a Sutton resident and chair of NEK Community Broadband. "We are well-positioned to direct and contribute to new investment in this essential service, thanks to our organizing earlier this year."

Residents in 27 towns voted at Town Meeting to jointly form the NEK Community Broadband

CUD thanks to outreach efforts from community volunteers and supportive organizations, including the Northeastern Vermont Development Association and the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative. Created by a 2015 state law, a CUD is a municipal entity that can act on behalf of multiple towns to bond and raise revenue to build and operate broadband infrastructure in the region.

Member towns span Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties: Albany, Barnet, Barton, Brighton, Burke, Concord, Coventry, Craftsbury, Danville, East Haven, Glover, Greensboro, Groton, Hardwick, Kirby, Lowell, Lyndon, Newark, Peacham, Ryegate, Saint Johnsbury, Sheffield, Stannard, Sutton, Waterford, Westfield, and Wheelock.

Membership is expected to expand over time to include additional interested towns in the three-county region.

Over the last two months, town select boards of member towns have appointed representatives

to serve on the CUD governing board. On April 30, the CUD held its first board meeting via Zoom. Board members worked together to elect officials and vote on governance documents — the first step toward bringing broadband connectivity to all of the NEK

"It's ironic that we as the governing board were forced to conduct our first organizational meeting in a way that tested the limits of our regional broadband capacity," said Katherine Sims of Craftsbury, a new member of the CUD's executive committee. "Thankfully votes were cast, discussions were had, and now our real work begins."

Next up on the CUD's agenda: securing funding to build and operate the infrastructure, which won't happen overnight.

For a list of representatives by town in the NEK Community Broadband CUD and to stay up-to-date on the progress they're making, visit their new website at [www.nekbroadband.org](http://www.nekbroadband.org). — from the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative.



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