

# Welcome To Bucketville

By Anita Rafael

In the olden days, all the hand-churned butter that was being made from the milk from Vermont's famous dairy farms was kept in covered wooden tubs, long before the era of tinned cans and plastic, and those tubs were handmade of wooden staves, heads and hoops. Making tubs, along with pails, buckets, churns, firkins, and their larger cousins, barrels, kegs, hogsheads and tuns, was the work of coopers. There were two kinds of cooperage – tight and slack. Tight or wet coopers made water-tight barrels for liquids. Slack coopers made lidded wooden buckets for dry goods, like crackers, grains or flour; or for semi-dry goods, like butter, lard or soap. One village in southern Vermont, known for its industrious bucket making shop, inevitably became known as Bucketville.

On the *F. W. Beers & Co.* maps of Wardsboro from the late 1800s, there is a section of town named Unionville, and just in the middle of the hamlet, along the Whetstone Brook and in between the land holdings of H. French, E. Barber and E. Plimpton, are printed the words "Tub Fact." This indicates the location of the factory that belonged to Jedediah Clapp Estabrook in the 1870s, and '80s, a business run earlier by Emerson B. Barrett.

Estabrook's enterprise is said to have been the principal employer in the area, and one of the old business directories alphabetically lists it under "B" for butter-tub maker. Another source says that the shop produced about 25 tubs, buckets and pails per day.

Estabrook was born in July, 1820, one of eleven children, not all of whom survived infancy. His father was Dr. Jedediah Estabrook, a well-regarded physician who had moved from Dummerston to West Dover.

Estabrook married a Smead – Roseanna, or in the old records Roxanna – and they had 6 children. She died in May, 1876. His second wife was the widow Sarah M. Curtis, and they had no children together. An old Windham County *Gazetteer*, the one that's kept in an archival box at the Wardsboro Public Library, says that Estabrook was also a justice of the peace, and owned a 10-acre parcel, which the town taxed as "mowing."

The bucketmaker died in December, 1888, aged 68, and was buried in the South Wardsboro Cemetery, but there is no trace of his name there now. (For townsfolk who may

be related, there is an extensive Estabrook family genealogy on the internet.) Sarah survived her husband by more than 20 years and did not marry again. She kept the house and barn, but sold the shop and fields.

Along the main road through the hamlet, there were about 12 residences in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and there were, in addition to the tub factory, many other industries. The records show a grist mill, a saw mill, a cider mill, a box and sieve-hoop shop, and blacksmith shop. Yet, it was the busy bucketmakers that gave the place its special identity. Is it possible that hanging on a peg in some old barn in or near Wardsboro there might be a bucket from Bucketville? But, if there is, how would anyone know it is one of Estabrook's? The thousands of generic tubs, buckets, and pails that the factory produced were probably not labeled.

The old maps show that the main road though Unionville – that is, Bucketville – was less than a mile long. If you are traveling from north to south along Route 100, it ran from about the intersection with Bills Road (where the Bills Lumber sign is painted on a rusty old plow) to just past the sharp curve, where there is still a cluster of small houses and camps beside the brook and close to the road. The vintage maps place the factory about halfway between these two ends, down a short lane leading to the banks of the brook.

In the photo-history book, *Wardsboro, VT – Exposing the Past*, the third chapter is all about Bucketville and on pages 35 and 40 there are bird's eye views. Author Amy Kleppner writes that the area was also known as Wardsboro Center when a post office was established there, and Dan Hescok, one of the book's editors, says Unionville had a Union Church and a Union Store at one time. (The 128-page paperback, first printed in 2003, is on sale at the Wardsboro Public Library and costs \$19.95.)

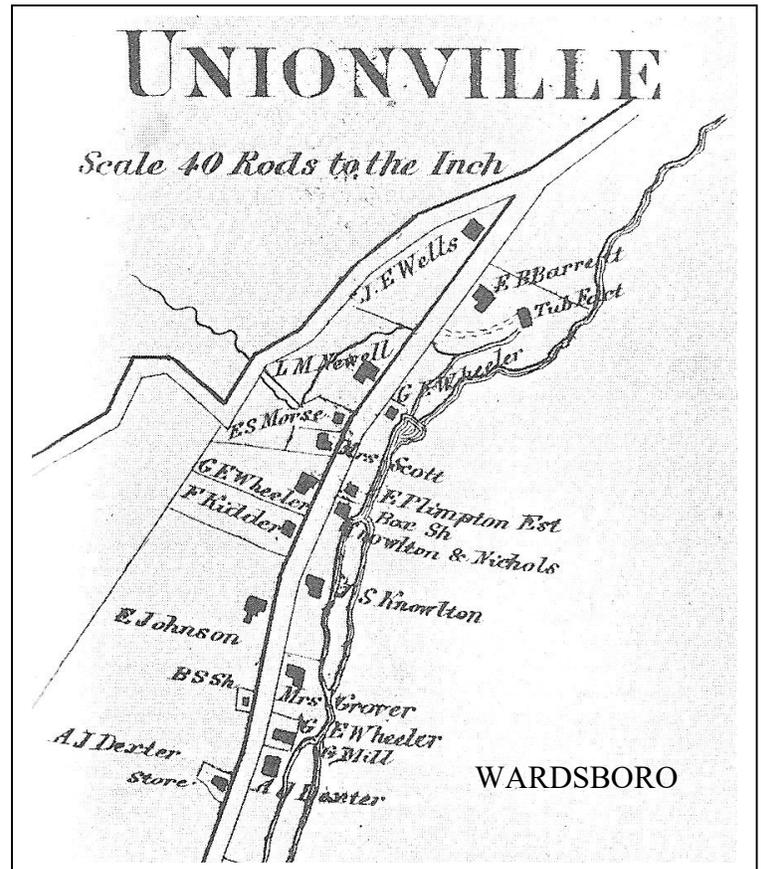
It is rather curious that this scant one-mile stretch of road is, or was, known by four different names – District 7, for its original one-room school; Wardsboro Center, for its post office; Unionville, perhaps for its store and church; and lastly, everyone's favorite: Bucketville, for a small country factory. Not one of the things it was named for are there now – no school, no post office, no school, no store and no bucket factory. No sign points to "Bucketville" nor is it on any official map.

And yet, the legacy of the locale is not entirely forgotten by the residents of the town today. This past May, the citizens of the town of Wardsboro celebrated the tenth anniversary of the publication of their local monthly

newsletter, the *Bucketville News*. It is an all-volunteer project edited and coordinated by Wardsboro resident Nancy Perkins. The newsletter began as a school project, and for reasons that seem to have been lost to posterity, was named for the un-named village of Bucketville.

Eventually, the production of the *Bucketville News* evolved into a community-wide project as writers, photographers, layout editors, printing technicians, paper folders and various assistant editors generously volunteered their time to keep it going long after the original grant funding expired. It is self-published and funded by a smattering of paid advertisements, plus subscriptions and donations. The first week of every month, about 250 copies of the newsletter are bulk mailed, and a handful are always neatly stacked at Wardsboro's two general stores – the one on Cross Road in West Wardsboro and the one on Main Street in Wardsboro center.

Despite the traffic on busy Route 100, Bucketville is a good deal quieter now than it was in the days when all the factories, mills and workshops were operating, but still, there is a lot of “small-town America” living going on in Wardsboro. It is all neatly recapped and chronicled every month in the charmingly folksy and simply black and white *Bucketville News*.



What a butter tub looks like; this one is painted, and looks as if parts of it were made with hand-cranked, water- or steam-driven machinery. Most were not a specific size, but generally were about 10-12 inches high, by 10-12 inches in diameter. Much larger tubs, sometimes called *butter firkins*, held 56 pounds of butter by standard British measure, or ¼ barrel by volume.