

HISTORY OF THE GRANITE STATE CARRIAGE ASSOCIATION

by Ginger Laplante 2005, updated 2012 and 2024

The Granite State Carriage Association was founded in 1978 in the living room at Windswept, Lansing Mallett's farm on Old Schoolhouse Road in Canterbury New Hampshire. Several members of The Concord Coach Society, which collected all things relevant to the coaches, wished to drive horse drawn vehicles as well as collect them. To this end they gathered together a small group of people who they thought might be interested in founding a driving club. I remember the following as being at this first meeting: Lansing Mallett, Mike & Ginger Plisko (now Laplante), and Bill Mears from Canterbury, Ed Rowse from Loudon, and Daisy and Lawrence Hale from Concord. Possibly more were there who I do not remember.

It was decided to form a club and call it The Granite State Carriage Association. Additional members were sought and the group was soon large enough to begin activity. Among the other early members were Marcia Evans from Hopkinton, Roy and Emily Glines, David Jenesta, Eileen Peterson and Robert & Edith Bishop, all from Canterbury, Dr Freese from Concord, Ellet Seavey from Candia, Will & Linda Starace from Raymond and Barbara Hurd from W. Newbury, Ma. The last three are still active members as are Eileen Peterson, and Ginger Laplante. Ellet Seavy was active until his death in 1999 at the age of 79. His wife Shirley has since passed away, and the club still honors them with an annual Ellet and Shirley Seavey Memorial Drive.

The first club activity was a drive held at the Plisko's farm, Canterbrook, in Canterbury. The future horse show buildings were under construction at the time and lunch was held on

the high platform which would become the base of the secretaries' booth. As the Canterbrook Horse Shows began in 1978 this must have been in 1977 or spring 1978.

As at present, drives were held at members' homes or other places they arranged for during the early years. One major difference from the present was the annual scheduling of several sleigh drives in the winter. These were dropped by 1990 due to various combinations of no snow, no parking plowed out for trailers, trailers snowed in, rain or other horrible weather, horses not properly shod etc. resulting eventually in light attendance. For several years we held a moonlight group sleigh hay ride and potluck supper near Rochester, NH. These were popular but again were plagued by no snow, rain and/or no moon due to clouds so they too were dropped.

We also participated in the Gunstock Ski Area's Winter Carnival in 1983 and 1984. They plowed out their cross country ski trails for our sleighing use and provided us with a hot lunch at the parking area. The first year this was delivered on noisy snowmobiles to our horror. Fortunately no horses spooked. In return for this hospitality we held a sleigh parade across the base of the ski slopes. By the second year it became obvious that this was an accident waiting to happen. The administration made no attempt to keep horses, sleighs and skiers separated and the skiers acted as though we were not there, moving about in all directions oblivious of the horses. One kid on a sled actually shot under Daisy Hale's pony! So we politely declined the next invitation to sleigh at the Gunstock Winter Carnival.

For several years we had a wonderful 20 mile drive and barbecue-- originally lamb and later chicken. This ran either from Lansing Mallett's to Bill Mears' farm and back or the reverse with the barbecue at the destination farm in the

middle of the drive. This broke the distance up and gave the horses a rest. Unfortunately after Bill ceased to drive his pony, the only two farms available were Lansing's and Ginger's and they were only four miles apart so it became difficult to plan long enough routes between the two farms without using too much pavement or busy roads so these events ceased by 1990.

Another annual drive we always looked forward to was the early spring drive which Ellet Seavey held at his Candia field in April. This ran for several years until it was decided that it was just too early for decent weather and horses fit enough to go out. For several years Monty Warman held a fall Foliage drive in Brookfield. This was taken over in 1988 by Don and June Kunar who held it at Wadleigh State Park for five years. Theirs was a particularly interesting drive as we always took a lovely country route past Muster Field Farm.

Several driving clinics were held during the early years but they were eventually dropped due to lack of attendance. Beach drives were also tried but were not very successful.

In recent years there has been a great increase in the number of driving overnight weekends and weeks as many of our members are campers who seem to enjoy them. These are usually scheduled so you can come for one or more days of the entire number of days scheduled. The exception is the very distant driving weekends such as the one to Acadia National Park in Maine. For those one usually goes for the entire time.

One thing has not changed almost since the beginning. Our members wish to drive for pleasure only and most are not overly interested in holding competitions except for simple fun ones. We did have a fun three phase event at Lansing

Mallett's one early year but it was a lot of work and was not repeated. I still have the left over ribbons in my office closet.

The first Annual Meeting must have been held in 1979 as the flyer for the 1984 Annual Meeting states that it is the fifth. This is the earliest Annual Meeting Flyer still extant. According to the Calendar of Events, the 1983 meeting was held at the Chateau Restaurant in Manchester. The 1984 meeting and the next two were held at Kimball's Lakeside Restaurant in Hopkinton. In 1988 Jimmie's Seafood Restaurant in Concord was tried once, then we moved on to The Old Mill in Epsom for two years and then Hudson's Fireside Restaurant in Epsom for five years. The Greenhouse Cafe in Amherst was tried in 1998 but then we met in The Lantern Restaurant in Manchester for five years before moving on to The Yard in Manchester for another five years. For many years the Annual Meeting featured a speaker after dinner and the business meeting. In 1999 a silent auction was added and then in 2000 a live auction to raise much needed monies for insurance and expenses. This proved very popular and has continued ever since. However the auction took up so much time that by 2004 it was decided to not have a speaker as well. In 2010, the speaker was resumed. Thanks to the annual auctions the club continues in good financial shape.

The November Planning Meetings also date almost from the beginning of the organization. Until 1988 they were pot lucks held in the Parish House of the Canterbury United Church. In 1989 we moved to the meeting room in the East Concord Church where we stayed for about four years. They then moved to Ginger and John Laplante's farm, Canterbrook for three years. We then tried The Carriage Barn in Newton but found it too distant for most people. The meeting then returned to Canterbrook for a year before ceasing to be a pot luck and moving for three years to the Weathervane

Restaurant in Manchester, which proved in the final year to be entirely too noisy for holding a meeting. We then moved to The Lantern Restaurant for three years only to again find in the final year that we had to share the large room with a noisy family party at the other end. We then moved to The Yard in Manchester for several years and are currently maintaining at the Puritan Backroom in Manchester.

Over the years our membership has grown greatly. We began with just a handful. By 1981 we had 50 members, by 1989 it was 72 members. It varied between the 50's and the 70's until 1999 when it was 90. In 2000 it jumped to 121; 2001 was 137; 2003 was 127; 2004 , 142 and in 2005 it was 142. In 2012, membership is 120 or so.

Attendance at events has paralleled the membership numbers. In the days when membership ranged from 50 to 70 there would usually be around 6 rigs at a drive. That increased to about 15 or so until the recession when the numbers again dropped. We now also have a goodly number of horseback riders at our events. Many members continue on our list for years but seldom show up at an event. Perhaps they remain members because they like the newsletter or the annual meeting gathering which is usually large. Most likely they maintain their interest in carriage driving and the club activities.

I began the Newsletter early in the life of the organization when I was the Secretary but I cannot remember the year. It was first done on the typewriter and mimeograph machine and its looks left a lot to be desired. I think it may have come out irregularly also but I really can't remember and all of the early issues seem to have disappeared. As there was no Editor until 1990, the Secretary was responsible for the Newsletter at that time. Then, when someone else became Secretary, it more or less died and the Secretary sent out

notices of events with news and for sale ads sometimes attached.

I know it became a regular thing again before 1993 when another member took it over for a year. I took it over again the next year and have been the Editor ever since. Over the years it has grown to include reports on events, member and general driving or horse related news, and articles, poems, funny writings and lists of interest to our membership, as well as occasional reports on related web sites and other things. Always included are For Sale, Upcoming Events and Membership Information. Drawings have been used to illustrate articles and have provided an interesting back cover from the beginning. Technology made it possible to also include photographs for the last few years although they were not of the best quality. The Newsletter now comes out via Email almost monthly, and has often grown to six or eight pages of content plus event notices.

I think our logo of the man driving his happily trotting horse to a stylish two wheeled cart was chosen about the time the Newsletter began. It appears on the single 1984 copy still extant and was chosen because it epitomized the kind of pleasure driving our group enjoys. The original, titled "The Roadster," is to be found on page 87 of "Driving as I Found It" by Frank Swales, published in 1891 by Brentanos London, Paris, Washington, Chicago, New York.

Several variations of the logo with text have appeared, altered for use on apparel, club banners, and coffee mugs. In 2020, a major modification was made to add a ridden horse to the logo art. An old fashioned line drawing of a horse with a lady rider was chose, to be in keeping with the original ink drawing, but mostly to reflect that the club has always welcomed horseback riders.

On that note I will close as our members happily trot their horses at event after event and the GSCA itself trots on into the future.

*Virginia (Ginger) Laplante (formerly Plisko)
Founding member & Editor, Historian, Archivist, and
GSCA Lifetime Member*