

## The West River Trail Passes from Dream to Reality

*A long, circuitous path in creating one of Dummerston's most important recreational resources*

*by Alex Wilson*

Dummerston walkers, hikers, joggers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, and bicyclists have a lot to celebrate with the November, 2017 court decision that assures public use of the West River Trail at the Rice Farm Road access. But it's been a long and confusing process to get to this point. With this article, I'd like to describe the history of the West River Trail and the long-term efforts of Friends of the West River Trail (FOTWRT) to formalize the old West River Railroad bed into a public-use trail.

### Early efforts to formalize the West River Trail

I first got involved in efforts to formally establish the trail in 1997, when I saw for-sale signs on a 23-acre parcel along the rail bed that was owned by Jim Severance. I pulled a few people together, including Monroe Whitaker and Bill Schmidt, and we negotiated with Mr. Severance to purchase the property, with support of the Vermont Land Trust. That sale fell through at the last minute, but we had meanwhile begun an effort to build support for formalizing a trail on the rail bed, which had been informally used for many decades (sometimes without permission), since the failure of the railroad that operated between Brattleboro and Londonderry. (The last operating segment extended only to the Presbrey Leland Quarry in West Dummerston.)

Our group of volunteers began meeting regularly and began discussions with property owners along the trail, hoping to secure permanent easements for the trail. We were working on forming a nonprofit organization to advance the trail when we learned that there already was an organization working to create a trail along the *upper section* of the rail bed—in South

Londonderry and Jamaica. Rather than form a new organization, we joined their efforts as the Lower Section of FOTWRT.

We spent several years researching deeds, meeting with property owners, and developing  
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### Aging Well

*was the subject of a Dummerston Cares workshop. Pictured (left to right) are Bill Schmidt, the emcee, and panelists Mary Lou Schmidt, Tom Zopf, and John Wilcox. See story on page 6.*

## Coming of Age in 1940s West Dummerston

*By Jean Bruce Momaney*

Growing up in West Dummerston was a wonderful experience. The village had two stores, two churches, a very active Grange, a library, a busy sawmill, and the extraordinary, special Dr. Burnett.

The elementary school was a two room schoolhouse. At close to nine o'clock the flag would be hung on the porch and then there was the ringing of the bell. You could hear the bell from quite a distance and you had better hurry because being tardy was not a good thing. The only negative memory of school is the awful cod liver capsules we were given to keep us

healthy. Yuck.

In winter time, we did sledding on the hill, and there was a small ice pond on the ballfield for skating. Sometimes there would be a small bonfire while we were skating.

The Baptist Church had a youth group leader who occasionally would have get-togethers with us kids in the evening at someone's house in the village, followed by cocoa.

The older generation held card parties on Saturday nights. We kids were welcomed, encouraged to learn different card games, and there were competitive teams. We learned  
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