

## **Susan Griggs Discusses Benjamin Grosvenor & The Ben Grosvenor Inn**

In the half century between 1870 and 1923 no townsman was more popular in Pomfret than Benjamin Grosvenor. As proprietor of the Ben Grosvenor Inn and owner of several of the best farms, he was the largest employer in town. His bountiful larder was supplied with vegetables and dairy products from Spring Farm on Ragged Hill, poultry and eggs from Hamlet Farm.

The many fine cottages he built for the accommodation of his guests were always filled. As a landlord, he was known all along the Atlantic Seaboard. Benjamin Grosvenor died in 1923, leaving the management of the Inn to his son, John. He also had a daughter, Mrs. J. D. Campbell, of Pomfret.

Benjamin Grosvenor was born at the old Grosvenor-Chandler homestead, at the foot of Chandler Hill, one of the three houses built by his pioneer ancestress, Esther Grosvenor. This house is now owned by Carlton Shaw Est. As a boy he attended the Chandler School and Woodstock Academy.

In 1866, following the advice of Horace Greeley to "Go West, Young Man," he went to the wilds of Nebraska, as an appointed agent to the Winnebago-Omaha Reservation, to teach cultivation to the Indians. This region became the richest wheat-raising district in the state.

In 1867 he returned to Pomfret to marry Miss Anna Mathewson. Their wedding took place at daybreak on the morning of December 23. They started on the early morning train for their honeymoon trip to the west, where Mr. Grosvenor had a new home waiting. The Missouri River not being bridged at that time, they were given long poles to make the crossing on the ice less dangerous. Fortunately, they made the crossing safely. But tragedy awaited their friends, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Sharpe and child, who had come across the river to welcome them to their new home. In making the return trip, all three were drowned, as the ice broke under them. The Sharpe family was also from Pomfret, having preceded the Grosvenor's to Nebraska.

Two days later, Mrs. Grosvenor awoke in her own home, to find her yard full of Indians who were awaiting their turn to sharpen their knives and axes. Apparently, the Grosvenor's were not pleased with the west, for at the end of two years they returned to Pomfret and purchased the property then owned by James Averill (the Reverend Aaron Putnam house), and opened the home for summer boarders. From this modest beginning Mr. Grosvenor achieved success. Another of Pomfret's sons to answer the call of the west at this period was Darius Mathewson 2nd. Remaining in the locality where Grosvenor had settled, he founded the town of Wakefield, and saw the region develop into the state's richest wheat field. Mr. Grosvenor took a leading part in all town affairs. After his death his son, John, maintained the Inn until the coming of the Automobile Age wrought many changes in the patronage of the hill-top summer resorts. With the reduction of business, the Inn was eventually closed and the entire property sold in the fall of 1943 to the Pomfret School, reopened in 1947. Benjamin Grosvenor built several

cottages that today, with the church, make up the major residential part of Pomfret Street. Most of these cottages stand on what was once the Zachariah Waldo farm.