

HISTORY OF FALL FOLIAGE FESTIVAL

The idea for the Fall Foliage Festival began with a foliage weekend about 1955, when members of the Danville Chamber of Commerce decided to capture some of the tourist dollars going through town, and help acquaint travelers with Vermonters and the way we live. Henry "Hank" Balivet, Jr., Reg Smith, Peg Carr and others were early organizers.

The weekend of tours and meals in Danville was successful and they decided to expand the activities to include other towns and villages (Passumpsic, Peacham, Ryegate and Groton). Walden's first program was in 1958, and was included on the Festival Flyer in 1959. In 1959, the brochure included nine days, with Wednesday and Thursday open for travel to other places in the area.

"Hank" tried to find something different for a theme for each town (Scotch heritage in Barnet, Lumberjack in Groton, Christmas trees in Walden). In 1957, Danville tried out water dowsing on the Green and it caught on. In 1958, the Water Witch Convention was on Saturday, October 4, when Peacham and Barnet joined them. In 1959, flyers advertised the second annual Dowsers Convention. By 1962, the American Society of Dowsers became so large that Danville decided to withdraw from the Festival and go with "Dowsing".

The other towns realized they had a good thing going and organized themselves into the Fall Festival Committee. Each town plans its own program, but the Town Chairman is a member of the full committee. The Committee meets once a year to elect a Chairman who handles publicity and mailing; and a Treasurer who pays for printing of flyers. Any issues that affect all the towns are discussed. The next year's dates are well established now.

C. Kenneth Wallace and Luther Parker, both of Peacham served as Chairmen until 1964 and Betty Hatch served until her health failed and her daughter Judy Clifford has assumed responsibility since 2012. Josephine French of Groton was a long term Treasurer, replaced by Pauline Urie in 1996. Joyce Fowler took over in 2003. The Festival week is based on the first Saturday in October as Groton's Home-coming and traditional Chicken Pie Supper with the other towns in sequence prior. Presently Marshfield follows on Sunday or precedes on Sunday.

Five towns (Walden, Cabot, Peacham, Barnet & Groton) have worked together since 1962. West Danville joined in 1963 and 1964. Marshfield took over the Wednesday spot from 1965 to 1968, until their help aged and retired. Plainfield has been involved since 1969. Marshfield came back with a Sunday program in 1992 following Groton. St. Johnsbury joined in 1996 and now works in their own community with the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium, St. Johnsbury Athenaeum and many other sponsors for an early September celebration.

A maple leaf logo appeared on the banner of the 1962 flyer of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom Annual Fall Foliage Festival and was adopted in 1965, with an area map superimposed.

The towns have tried to maintain their original intent of providing an inexpensive vacation where visitors can get acquainted with us and see how we live and work. Many lasting friendships have been made and many folks return year after year to see how we fare.

Visitors are encouraged to take part in the activities of each town. A varied menu of Vermont specialties is offered in the lunches and suppers served and area craftspeople display their wares.

Vermont's Northeast Kingdom

Annual Fall Foliage Festival

