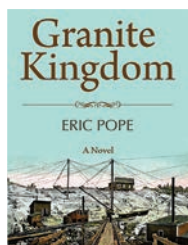


Hardwick
When granite
was king.
24



Lyndonville
Harmonious NEK
Orchestra.
22

the Chronicle

THE WEEKLY JOURNAL OF ORLEANS COUNTY

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ONE DOLLAR

Board ponders middle school options

by Trisha Ingalls

GLOVER — No new ideas and no decisions Monday night as the Lake Region Union Elementary-Middle School District (LRUEMSD) board met following last week's public forum.

Board members were asked to circulate in the Glover school gymnasium and look at the notes from the forum to notice themes for discussion. There was an overwhelming theme of needing to support teachers and students. During the course of the evening it remained unclear what that support should look like, though the sentiment was repeated dozens of times. Krista Mayer, member from Glover, said she picked up on a theme of frustration with the status quo, and so (Continued on page 31.)

Jasper Hill must house workers as well as cheese

by Trisha Ingalls

GREENSBORO — Jasper Hill Farm will be celebrating its twentieth year of cheese-making in 2023. Its cheeses have won best of show at the American Cheese Society four times, the best unpasteurized cheese in the world for its Bayley Hazen Blue, and recently won eight medals at the World Cheese Awards. It seems only one thing can hold this quintessential Vermont business back: housing. The award-winning cheese-makers have had to come up with their own solutions in order to continue to attract world-class talent.

(Continued on page 34.)

Turkey Trot turns 20



Caleb Cilwik heads up Water Street, Thursday. The University of Vermont freshman led the field in the twentieth running of Barton's Turkey Trot, held in memory of Melissa "Missy" White and Josh Murray, both of whom died of cystic fibrosis. Mr. Cilwik took the last uphill leg with ease and finished at least a minute ahead of his competitors. For more about the trot please see page six.

Photo by Matthew Wilson



Rock-solid first novel from Eric Pope

Granite Kingdom: a novel, by Eric Pope; Published by Rootstock Publishing, Montpelier, 2022. Hardcover, 274 pages, \$24.95.

Reviewed by Joseph Gresser

Eric Pope and his wife, Karen, bought the *Hardwick Gazette* 40 years ago and ran it for the next decade. Usually an author's biography is of limited interest, but Mr. Pope's first book draws on the history of the town he covered and is centered in the paper's barely fictionalized offices.

The novel is set in the village of Granite Junction, a community that has more than a passing physical resemblance to Hardwick. The time is 1910, when granite has supplanted lumber and dairy as the economic engine of the area.

Mr. Pope draws on deep research into the social conditions of early twentieth-century Hardwick and an imagination fueled by his experience as editor of a small-town weekly.

He tips his hand early in the book when his hero, Dan Strickland, a youthful reporter for the *Granite Junction Gazette*, interviews Ernest Wheeler, the owner of a granite

operation and asks him a personal question:

"How did you attain such great success in business?"

A slight smile played across Wheeler's lips. "You ask the most peculiar questions, young man. I very much doubt your editor is interested in my affairs."

"Perhaps not, but I would like to know how to get ahead."

"Like Ragged Dick, perhaps?"

"How did you know my thoughts?" Dan asked.

"I was once an avid reader of Horatio Alger's stories about young men who gain prosperity through hard work and determination. His book *From Farm to Fortune* inspired me to leave my family and go into business at the age of nineteen."

"All on your own?"

"No, I had a benefactor like those you meet in the Alger books," Wheeler said.

Strickland, like many of Alger's heroes lost his father, a skilled granite worker, and to help with family finances was forced to drop out of the local academy, from which

he hoped to go to college, and took a job as a printer's devil at the *Gazette*.

The work, which left him wearing ink stained clothes, causes his old schoolmates to shun him, but by dint of hard work, the lad is given increasing amounts of responsibility by the paper's editor, Clarence Slayton. More interested in writing high-falutin editorials than attending to the less glorious tasks of selling ads and reporting on day-to-day doings around the village, Slayton unintentionally gives Strickland opportunities to gain skills and make himself known to major figures in the community.

Those include George Rutherford, Wheeler's more successful rival in business, and the town's leading citizen.

Rutherford's business prospers because of his ability to provide enough high-quality granite to build city halls and state capitols around the nation. Wheeler, the smaller competitor cannot afford to pay the union wages offered by Rutherford or buy the most modern electric-powered tools to speed production.

He wins some victories in court, but the gains he might realize are held up by Rutherford's lawyers who are experts at using all the delaying tactics the law provides.

While Wheeler fumes about Rutherford's successes, his foreman, Bill Blackwell, a bitter man trapped in a loveless marriage and forced to support his in-laws on their

unproductive hill farm, thinks he knows more effective ways to promote his boss' interests.

Mr. Pope's set-up has all the elements of an Alger plot, rich men of a kindly nature, villainous ruffians, and an innocent but plucky hero. The book even bears some of Alger's plain-spun prose style.

What the author has, but his model lacks, is true curiosity about the world his characters inhabit. Mr. Pope takes the reader into the granite sheds and shows off the machinery used to cut and smooth building stone, often at the cost of their operator's health.

Mr. Pope has done his homework and shares what he has learned as an organic part of the plot. For instance, when Wheeler takes Strickland to his quarry to show him how Rutherford has trespassed on his property, Mr. Pope surveys the scene:

Half a dozen men were engaged in lifting a large block of granite onto a flatbed car with a hoist-like, steam-driven derrick that towered over the tracks like the mast of a schooner.

Granite blocks in a variety of shapes and sizes lay all around. Another derrick with its mammoth boom extended at a forty-five-degree angle stood idle midway up the wide ledges created by the excavation of granite over many years. Derrick guy-wires extended in all

(Continued on page 25.)

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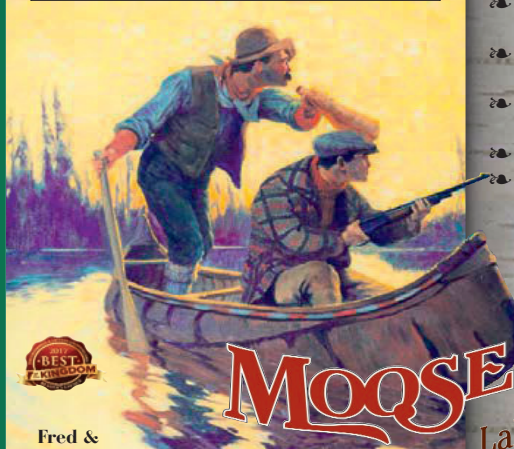


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Will grit and determination win the day?

(Continued from page 24.)

directions like the web of a giant spider. Since electrical lines had not reached the quarries, a coal-fired boiler at the top of the ridge provided steam for the drills that filled the quarry with a pulsating roar that reverberated off the hard rock surfaces.

As the reader will come to realize, Wheeler's lack of electrical power gives Rutherford a commercial advantage. One strand of the plot hinges on the disparity.

He knows about the lives lived by skilled immigrant workers, necessary to the granite industry, but scorned by the Yankee residents of Granite Junction.

The reader visits stores and sees their merchandise, from slightly out-of-fashion frocks and bonnets to the latest cameras produced by the Kodak company.

Horatio Alger would never think to explore the connection between the temperance movement and the struggle to win women the right to vote, but Mr. Pope does.

Strickland wins the trust of both Rutherford and Wheeler, which proves tricky when someone starts a campaign of sabotage against the larger company.

Rutherford, suspecting the hand of anarchists asks Strickland to investigate on his behalf. Although those ideas are current among Italian immigrants in the village, the workers know they make more money than they would elsewhere. They rely on their union to argue for protections against dangerous equipment and white-lung, a fatal illness today know to be caused by granite dust, but which granite companies claimed was just a type of tuberculosis unrelated to work conditions.

In little ways Mr. Pope builds his portrait of a foreign community set in a familiar landscape. The tussle between horses and early motorcars and the advent of the bicycle as a simple mode of transportation are depicted in lively incidents.

The only serious omission from Mr. Pope's portrait of a Northeast Kingdom village in the first decade of the twentieth century is the absence of French Canadians. Mr. Pope, with the assistance

of the Hardwick Historical Society has clearly done a vast amount of research, so it is possible, however unlikely, that there were no French-speaking people in the area at the time. Still, it is hard to imagine that was the case.

Despite such quibbles, Mr. Pope has provided a lively picture of life in a town whose model still shows traces of its former industrial might in the granite sheds standing at Atkins Field, or the glorious Hardwick Memorial Building, faced with stone quarried locally. Anyone with a bit of curiosity about how those who came before us lived will find the world Mr. Pope sets before us answers many questions.

And for those who just love the plots of Horatio Alger's books, there is the question of whether Strickland's grit and determination will win him the golden ring of success. Mr. Pope provides an answer, but withholds it until the final pages of the book.

Readers will find those pages turn very quickly indeed.

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