

TILLING THE SOIL BENJAMIN ROWE was born in February 1790 to Simon and Mary M. Rowe of Brentwood, in Rockingham County, near the NH coastline. At that time, George Washington was in his first term as the unanimously elected, first President of the United States.



Rowe House owners (1908-1947), ERNEST & SADIE SAWYER, in their garden, c 1910

After working in the mills along Gunstock River in the Village, Benjamin purchased 85 acres of land from **JESSE THING**, property that once lay on both sides of Belknap Mountain Road and is currently where the three Gilford Schools and the recently restored and historically significant brick Rowe Farmhouse are all located. As a portion of the mountain that rises behind Pine Hill Brook was part of the acreage Benjamin purchased, the entire mountain was later named Mount Rowe in honor of the Rowe family.

Once settled in Gilford, Benjamin and Susanna Rowe expanded their family to four sons: **JOHN TUCK**, **SHEPARD**, **SIMON**, **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN** and one daughter, **HANNAH**. Two sons, Shepard and Simon, remained in Gilford near their parents while the other three settled elsewhere in Maine and in the mid-west.

It wasn't long before Benjamin discovered that the banks of the Pine Hill Brook flowing at the back of his new property contained a plentiful supply of clay. Benjamin realized that with a bit of effort he could convert the clay into bricks and use them to build the farmhouse that would house his family and descendants for years to come. He dug out the clay, shaped the clay mixture as oblong blocks, fired them in his kiln into bricks, and used them to construct the Farmhouse. And thus began Benjamin's successful brickmaking operation. Benjamin and his bricks built the other brick house in the Village, just a few doors north of the Rowe House and owned by another Benjamin - Benjamin Jewett who was one of the three founders of the still extant and popular Village Store.

BENJAMIN ROWE and his family were highly respected for many reasons. People admired their skills in the trades, their participation in the affairs of the town of Gilford, and their church lives at the Village Freewill Baptist Church (FWB), now the Gilford Community Church.

While also maintaining his brick business, Benjamin devoted much of his time developing their large family farm that at one point was second only to the spacious Potter Farm on top of Potter Hill Road. The Rowe acreage supported milking cows and dairy products, grew vegetables, and over the years produced tons of hay from the pastures.

A most familiar sight over 150 years were the cows peacefully grazing around the farmhouse and barn. Especially true



Possible remnants of an old clay pit in Pine Hill Brook behind the Rowe House

after 1938, when the adjacent brick school building was built. This new building consolidated dozens of scattered school houses and provided learning for the hundreds of children, many of whom still remember the cows next door.

Benjamin also stirred up interest in the area with his silkworm farm project, then a popular craze in New England. While the climate for silkworms was rough and irregular, the work itself was light and easily done by children, women, and those elders who were a common part of the many extended families in the 19th century. Helping out with meaningful tasks was one way to invest family members in the welfare of their own household.

PLANTING THE SEEDS When BENJAMIN died in March 1884 at age 93, the Rowe farm passed to **SIMON ROWE**, one of Benjamin's sons. The two families had already made a shift in their household arrangements even before the 1880 census that showed Benjamin and Susanna, well advanced in years, living on the farm, with Simon as the head of the household.



Silkworm farming. Suitable work for women and children.



Prior to farming, SIMON had owned a successful shoe-making business in the Village Square, that was patronized by his neighbors and those from surrounding communities who were willing to travel to Gilford Village for a good pair of shoes.

Simon's skills easily translated into managing the Rowe Farm while also handling many other responsibilities. He was involved in town affairs as Treasurer of the Ministerial

and Literary Fund, as the Gilford Town Clerk, and as a Selectman. He did some work for the Gilford School Districts and used his horses to "break out roads" after snowstorms.

Simon and his wife Mary were friendly and very good hosts. **JEREMIAH SMITH JEWETT** of Lake Village, then a part of Gilford, was a probable customer of Simon's former shoe business. On November 24, 1855, Jeremiah's day book tells of his traveling to Gilford Village via sleigh "to be measured for a pair of boots". An earlier entry on March 14, 1854, described the long session at Gilford's annual Town Meeting that he had attended with his father.

Profitable Land.

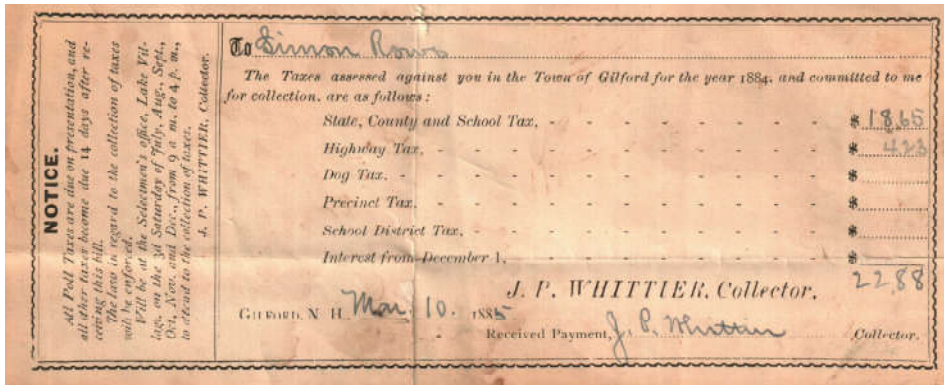
Sat. Sep 05, 1874 In 1872, Mr. Simon Rowe of Gilford Village plowed a piece of land containing about seven-eighths of an acre, which was burned out so that it hardly paid for mowing. He put on what manure he made from one horse, three cows and one pig through the summer, and the next Spring he sowed it to wheat and grass. He cut a good crop of wheat, and the same season mowed 1½ tons of good clover hay on the same piece. This year he mowed it about the 25th of June and got two tons of good hay and last week he mowed it again, getting one and a half tons of hay. Mr. Rowe is a believer in barn cellars.

J. N. D.

Big Cranberries

Sat. Nov 06, 1875 Mr. Simon Rowe of Gilford Village leaves with us samples of cranberries measuring 2¾ inches in circumference. They are of the Long Pond variety.

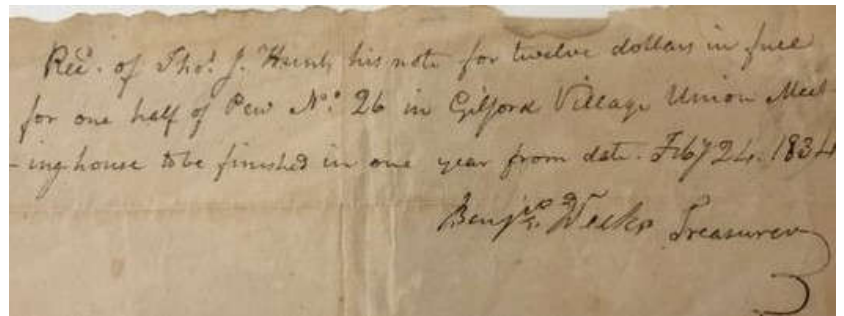
This entry reads: "Town Meeting. The weather fair and traveling good, The meeting was full and the whigs victorious, Father and I with others took dinner at Simeon Rows. When the meeting adjourned it snowed quite fast and did so until we reached home..."



Receipt for taxes paid by Simon Rowe to the Town of Gilford in 1884

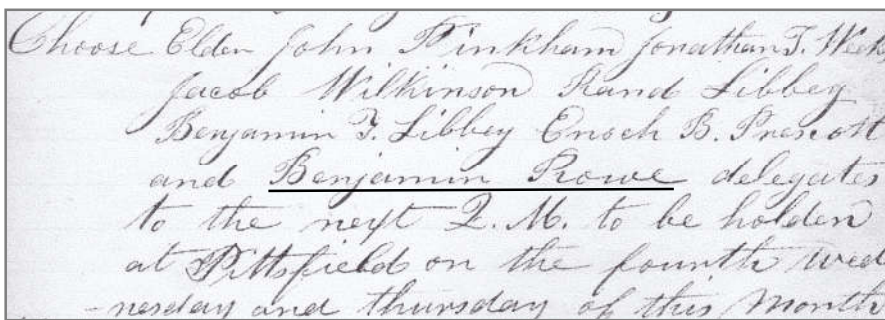
TENDING THE CROPS During their long lives, both BENJAMIN and SIMON remained active in the Village Free Will Baptist Church. After the **Gunstock Meeting House** on top of Gunstock Hill was vacated in the early 19th century, the four denominations who worshipped there were free to develop their own worship facilities.

Members of the Free Will Baptist congregation (FWB), one of the four churches without a home, spent a decade or so meeting as small groups in Gilford farmhouses such as the Rowes, and in schoolhouses, stores, and even outdoors, until they were ready for their own dedicated worship space.



A receipt given to THOS J HUNT for purchasing one-half of a pew for \$12.00 in the new Gilford Village Free Will Baptist Church

A "building committee" was needed to organize the church construction effort. BENJAMIN ROWE and two other men, BERNARD MORRILL and JOHN P SMITH, were the three tasked with finding a location, acquiring the property, and gathering funds to build their new facility. They were very successful and in two years had raised \$1,100 by selling pew seats to members, a custom at that time. On New Years Day in 1835, the new church building was dedicated.



Excerpt from the Log Books of the Gilford FWB, dated October 14, 1840, that names BENJAMIN ROWE as a Delegate to a Quarterly Meeting (Q.M.) in Pittsfield

Several FWB Log Books, now housed in the archives of the Thompson Ames Historical Society, record much of both Benjamin and SIMON's faithful work as church members, BENJAMIN ROWE was appointed the church "Ruling Elder" and records also cite that he was a frequent delegate to the *Quarterly Meetings (Q M)* of the many groups of Freewill Baptists. These two- or three-day gatherings required horse and buggy travel

over crude dirt roads to participate in larger church gatherings in nearby Laconia and other more distant places in Sanbornton, Alton, Belmont, Gilmanton, Pittsfield, Canterbury, Loudon and Strafford.

BENJAMIN and one other committee member (always male until later in the century) visited delinquent members and

tended to other member assessment activities. BENJAMIN also served as the President of the Gilford Freewill Baptist Sabbath School Society whose mission was to monitor the character and growth of younger members through Christian learning opportunities and activities. He was a donor to the Church Bell Fund in 1857.

It appears that all of Benjamin and Susanna's children continued to follow in their parents footsteps except for their oldest son, **JOHN TUCK ROWE**. John T. moved to Franklin, Maine, married, and earned his living as a stonecutter in the Frankfort Granite Quarry. Apparently **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN ROWE**, the youngest brother, was aware of his older brother's frayed relationship with God and on June 9, 1853 he wrote in his journal using the emotionally decorative language of that era...

"I have three brothers and one sister, all of whom are professors of religion except the eldest. The Lord give him grace to repent of his sins, that we may be an unbroken family in the Kingdom of Heaven, and that His holy name may be glorified by us all on earth."

SIMON's church work was also long and plentiful. He was Church Clerk for twenty years (1846-1867), and served as Church Treasurer, and Deacon. For over 30 years, Simon was also active with the Gilford FWB Sabbath School Society, including terms as President. Simon was also donor to the 1857 Church Bell Fund.



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN ROWE, the youngest in the Rowe family. He taught Elocution at Bowdoin College and died in 1861 at age 32 .



SIMON ROWE, MIDDLE SON OF BENJAMIN AND SUSANNA ROWE, TOOK OVER THE FARM. BENJAMIN AND SUSANNA CONTINUED TO LIVE IN THE FARMHOUSE WITH SIMON AND HIS FAMILY. SIMON DIED IN 1908 WHEN HE WAS 86.

*Chosen Brethren J. B. King & J. S. Gilman
delegates to the 2^d M with power of substitution
Voted to adjourn without date
Simon Rowe Clerk
Gilford Vll. May 5th 1857*

FWB Meeting Log Book

THE HARVEST The brick Rowe House property passed through a half dozen or so owners/managers including **ERNEST SAWYER** and **ALVAH WILSON** who were dairy farmers, In 1969, the Town of Gilford bought all 110 acres. The town initially used the farmhouse as headquarters for the Gilford School Superintendent and for a period of time, rented out the farmhouse as office space for the NH Music Festival.

The Town of Gilford then passed the management of the Rowe House to the Gilford Thompson Ames Historical Society. The Farmhouse has been lovingly renovated to its original status and is a local museum with donated period furnishings and artifacts. It is open to the public by request.

KATHY LACROIX, an active GCC member, is also a longtime Board member of the Gilford Historical Society and has a special interest in the history of the Rowe House.

Many long hours of exacting research on the Rowe House were led by **KATHY FRANCKE** and **ADAIR MULLIGAN**, both GCC members. Adair was also the author of an acclaimed history of Gilford, "*The Gunstock Parish*". Their goal was to add the Rowe House to the prestigious *National Register of Historic Places* by working in partnership with NH historians and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The awaited notification, saying that the Rowe House was now a

part of this Register, arrived on April 30, 2008, making this farmhouse a star among the other abundant historical highlights in Gilford Village.

Perhaps we might wonder if the Apostle Paul had in mind people like the Benjamin and Susanna Rowe family when he wrote to the Galatians.



**Kathy &
the late Jerry LaCroix
1998 GCC Directory**

The first burial in the Pine Grove Cemetery was **ALBANUS ROWE**, the young teenage son of Simon and Mary Rowe and the grandson of Benjamin and Susanna Rowe. Albanus died of "consumption" on August 16, 1860. As a young lad of about 12 years, Albanus began work in his father's very successful shoe shop in the Village where it was thought that being inside all the time contributed to his illness.

The town fathers then realized that the Village did not have an accessible "burying ground" for Albanus. **DAVID GOULD**, a neighbor of the Rowes, soon offered the town four acres of his land abutting the Rowe property as a cemetery for \$25.00. The deal was accepted and a cemetery plan was hastily prepared. Albanus was the first burial in the new Pine Grove Cemetery. His grave is in the front left corner of the cemetery within sight of the Rowe farmhouse where Simon and Mary then lived.

His mother Mary, devastated by her loss, was deeply troubled when looking out her kitchen window at the new cemetery and her son's fresh grave. Simon then planted a row of red pines to hide the gravesite from Mary's view. Later Simon and other family members were also buried alongside Albanus, now designated as Rowe Overlook.

If one sentence could describe the Rowe family, it might read like this. "Some 200 years ago, the Rowes planted bountiful gardens, ran a successful farm, raised a family, and contributed to their community, all while living faithful lives as guided by their church of choice."

Today, all of us are still reaping the harvest.



**Plaque on the front
of the Rowe house citing the home's
historical significance**



The curtain of trees planted 161 years ago now rise high in the sky. What once hid Albanus' grave from his mother's view would no longer provide that protection.

RESOURCES

People & Organizations

- Diana Duckoff, her vast resources on Gilford history, photographs, journals, newspaper clippings, historical files
- Kathy LaCroix who provided access to the Thompson Ames Historical Society archives and the Rowe House
- Susan Leach for photographs, genealogies, and her plentiful knowledge of Gilford
- Thompson Ames Historical Society
- The Gilford Community Church archives
- Laconia Library microfilm collection
- Gilford Library History Room
- Pine Grove Cemetery

Websites

- Ancestry.com
- Bibleref.com
- FamilySearch.org
- Find A Grave.com

Books, Articles, Journals, Newspapers,

Maps

- Brentwood, New Hampshire, Wikipedia article, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brentwood,_New_Hampshire
- Gilford Town Reports, 1850—1900 [Gilford, NH Annual Reports | New Hampshire City and Town Annual Reports | University of New Hampshire \(unh.edu\)](#)
- Gilford Village Freewill Baptist **Meeting Log Books**, 1846-1903
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- “*Silk Manufacturing in Westbrook*”, www.mainememory.net
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- Registration Form, *Benjamin Rowe House, Gilford Belknap County, New Hampshire*, National Register of Historic Places, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/77844656>
- Rowe, Benjamin Franklin, Journal, Thompson Ames Historical Society Archives
- Vintage Map of Brentwood, New Hampshire (partial), <https://tedsvintageart.com>



Grazing cows, a daily scene outside the Rowe Farmhouse until it was sold to the town of Gilford in 1969



Marker
Pine Grove Cemetery