

VERMONT NEWS GUIDE

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DRAWING BY SANDY READ

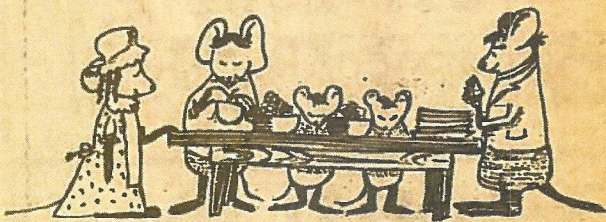
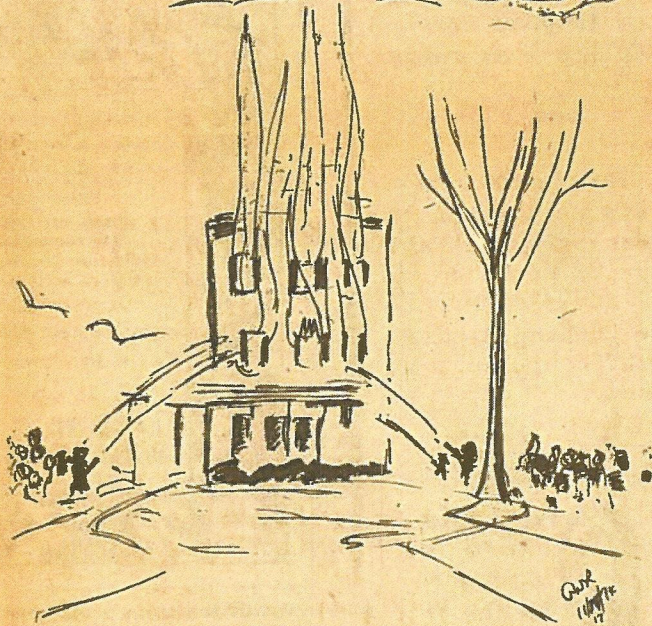
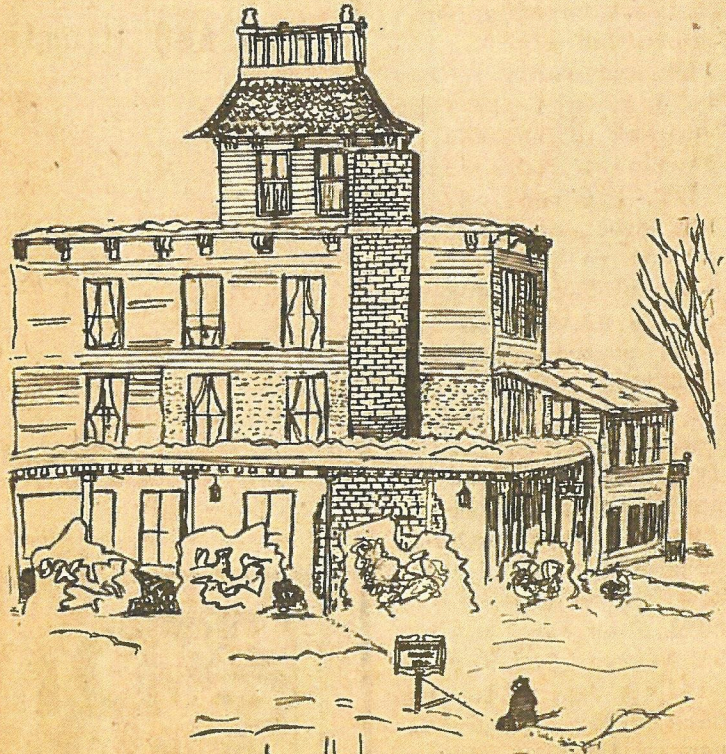
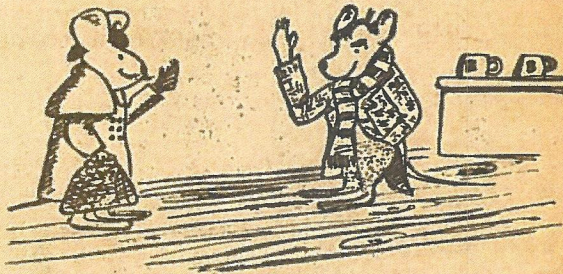
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Peru: A Poignant Story

Above, Benedict, the Canadian cousin, tramps away from Peru with a tear in his eye, in the wake of devastation by fire of the Bromley House and the Peru General Store. This is an epilogue by Sandy Read to his book about Morgan and Sarah, and children Ira and Asher, who dwelt those happy years ago in old Peru Town, and dined and wined well until disaster struck. See Inside.

NOTEBOOK/Scenes from The Christmas Rat or Morgan Mouse has Christmas Dinner

DRAWINGS BY SANDY READ



On the cover, Sandy Read shows us Benedict Mouse leaving Peru, his few belongings left after the fires in a bag on his shoulder. Above right, Benedict arrived from Montreal in smart beaver coat and with valise. Top left, Benedict being received by Morgan Mouse; next, Morgan and Benedict stroll with children Ira and Asher to hear Peru carol singers; below, Grace at Christmas dinner at the Peru General Store home behind the stove. Bottom right, Sandy Read's image of the Bromley House afire.

NOTEBOOK/Peru Commentary

Sandy Read of Peru brought us down his manuscript, not yet published, about Morgan Mouse and Christmas Dinner, a book he titled, "The Christmas Rat." The yarn tells how Uncle Benedict comes down to Peru from Montreal and imposes himself on Morgan Mouse, wife Sarah, and the two young mouse children, Ira and Asher. He's received at the Bromley House (established 1822), where he gets slightly squiffed. It's Christmas Eve, and after a look at the carol singers, concerns for Christmas Dinner are met by a trip to the Peru General Store. "The family stood around the table and listened to Morgan say Grace and then sat down. Morgan piled the plates in front of him with corn and crushed nuts...it's hard to describe a family of mice eating dinner, but there was a steady hum of munching and crunching, an occasional burp and swallow, and then silence."

We won't give away the rest of it. Suffice it to say that Sandy's tale captures the warmth of old Peru on a wintry December eve. And most of all, his story brings back memories of the Bromley House and the Peru General Store. Big people also come on the scene, a plot develops, Ira and Asher have a narrow escape, and at the end...

Back in those days, as Sandy relates, Morgan and Sarah Mouse and sons lived in the walls of the General Store behind the stove, and, in 1876, it was a social center of the town.

Sandy's book tells of beautiful Peru, with its wonderful landmarks, now both hit by fire--the Bromley House completely destroyed, the Peru Store gutted.

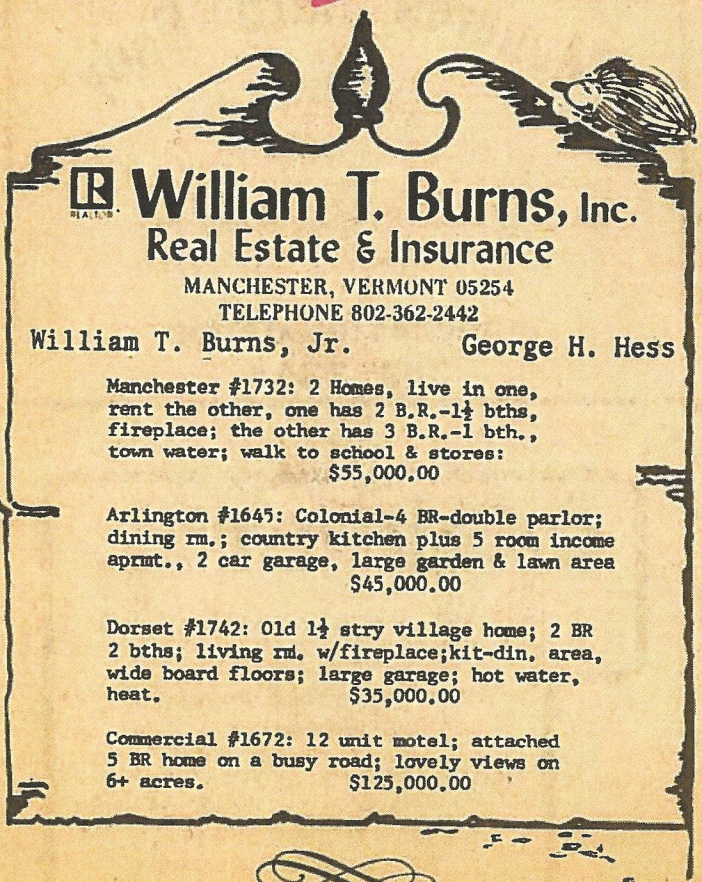
We don't know if the town will ever be the same as when Benedict Mouse got off the stage from Montreal and found such hospitality at the Bromley House and the Peru General Store...

We talked with several Peru residents--probing their feelings on the poignancy of what has happened to the town...how it used to be...

Arthur Kelton (former Peru General Store owner) says: "Well, I rented the old Peru Store from the Hapgood Estate

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III



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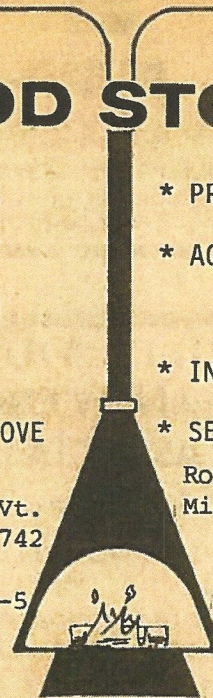
William T. Burns, Jr. George H. Hess

Manchester #1732: 2 Homes, live in one, rent the other, one has 2 B.R.-1½ bths, fireplace; the other has 3 B.R.-1 bth., town water; walk to school & stores: \$55,000.00

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NOTEBOOK/Peru Commentary (Contd)

in 1925...it had been closed for awhile. I married Elaine Millington in 1930, and in 1940 she acquired the store from her mother. The post office had been in the store from the late 1880's to 1915...then it was elsewhere for a few years. I took it back into the store in 1926 and had it there through 1958, when it went into its own building next door. I was Post Master for 35 years. I miss the place a great deal. Over the years, I was open every night but Sunday. Once I tried to close Thursday nights, but there was a weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It was a meeting place for all the boys..."

Arthur sold it to Bill and Joan Johnson, who sold it to Bill and Barbara Cass. Bill Cass says: "The thing I really remember most were the winter storms...and we became the problem solving center for the whole town. People were stuck, people couldn't get to work, and we ran out of bread. All snowed in..."

Brenda and Ron Johnson had it next. They opened the place up--lightened and brightened it. Added a touch of Brenda's handmade genius...always a smile. They sold it to John and Carole Rovnak. John says: "In July, when we walked in, and that was when we hadn't bought the place and weren't even sure, I said to Carole, 'what a comfortable place it was,' you could feel right at home in that old store...it was just like us...we felt close to it from the start. It was that kind of place."

Jack and Janice McWilliams had the Bromley House from 1959 to '73...Jack calls it, "A grand old lady with crooked floors..." and reminisces about the time over Washington's Birthday holiday when the pump in the well went..."with a full house...the guests had one flush a day...and you know, nobody left, they all stayed, and they all came back..."

The last folks to own the Bromley House were Tom and Tory Spater, who were doing a great job. Tory says: "I guess what I remember most is the candlelight in the dining room...and the warm pleasant feeling we all had there..."

Sissie Dibble, long time Peru resi-

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NOTEBOOK/Peru Commentary (Contd)

dent: "Peru General Store and the Bromley House were the heart of the community... the places where people would gather. There's no nicer life than village store life, where people gather and talk. That was the nature of the store, the friendship...and if you were ever out of something, or needed something special--a gift--you could always find it there. There were six stores in Peru's history, and the J.J. Hapgood store was the only one that survived. The Bromley House-- that was a warm place to go and have dinner...and so many young and old worked there...a great spirit of the town was there, a real focal point."

Charles Grant, a Peru old timer says: "The Bromley House and the Peru General Store were the hub of Peru in the early days. When we came to Peru, the store was the meeting place, the center of economic activity. If you wanted to know what was going on, you would go down to the store and listen. It was the central nerve center.

"You might say it was the first self service store in Vermont. Back in 1905, Frank Wyman was there and used to sit on a bench and lean on his cane...people would ask for where something was, and he'd say: "Up there!" But he didn't move. Except to take the money and put it in the drawer. I guess, most of all, the spirit of independence dominated Peru, and all the objectives were local. Everyone thought in terms of living in Peru, just Peru."

NOTEBOOK/November in Vermont

With November upon us, there is plenty for visitor and Vermonter alike to do. Traditional game suppers and hunters' breakfasts begin with deer season opening on Nov.15. Check the Almanac for details.

Vermont colleges show many Hollywood film classics during the winter months; for example, Bennington College's film society series offers "Hard Days Night" on Nov.8, "Psycho" on Nov.18 and "Dr. Strangelove" on the 22nd. All shows start at 8 PM. Part of Norwich University's Bicentennial Film Series will include "Yankee Doodle Dandy" in Northfield on Nov.16 at 8 PM.

Vermont's concert season is in full swing, and a free youth concert by the

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