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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Sweat and ash: the spirit of community in Windham

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 As we look to the future, we must recognize the people  
3 who are the backbone of Windham today, those who volunteer  
4 on the town's committees and offices

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 AS OUR TOWN begins discussions about budgets and  
7 property taxes, it's easy to focus on numbers and line items. These  
8 conversations also remind me of the dedication and effort  
9 required to sustain our community.

10 Windham didn't build itself; it was shaped by  
11 generations of residents who invested not just money, but time,  
12 labor, and creativity to lay the foundations of our town.

13 Thinking about our current challenges made me reflect  
14 on how far we've come since Windham's earliest days, when the  
15 community faced very different challenges, and yet relied on the  
16 same spirit of cooperation and commitment that still defines us  
17 today.

18 Back then, the town's needs were very different. As one  
19 of their highest priorities, Windham's Meeting House stands today  
20 as a testament to the resilience, resourcefulness, and ingenuity of  
21 its early settlers.

22 In 1800, Windham's population was 427 residents and  
23 rapidly growing. By 1820, it would grow to 931. With no  
24 established church or dedicated meeting space, worship services,  
25 education, and meetings were held in various locations,  
26 including local barns.

27 Recognizing the need for a dedicated space, residents  
28 raised funds and by 1801, construction was underway.

29 \* \* \*

30 RECENTLY, I found a striking story that brings this  
31 landmark to life. It involves a poor farmer who contributed \$15,  
32 about 20% of the average yearly income at that time, to support  
33 the Meeting House's construction.

34 How could someone with so little give so much? He  
35 turned to the forest. He produced potash through a labor-  
36 intensive process: cutting and burning 20–30 cords of wood,  
37 collecting the ashes, leaching them with water, and boiling the  
38 solution to yield the commodity.

39 Without a local market, he transported at least 130  
40 pounds of refined potash to Townshend. Months of grueling work  
41 turned into not just monetary support, but a profound  
42 demonstration of commitment to the community.

43 In this time, potash was used to make soap and glass,  
44 and it was used as fertilizer. This humble material became a

45 source of economic power, allowing this farmer to support his  
46 family and community.

47 The story of Windham's Meeting House is more than a  
48 tale of ash and toil. It is a narrative of community spirit, faith, and  
49 the lengths early settlers went to build a future for generations to  
50 follow. Their efforts laid the groundwork for a town that continues  
51 to honor the values of cooperation and dedication.

52 \* \* \*

53 TODAY, OUR CHALLENGES may be different, but the spirit  
54 remains the same.

55 Our community is exploring new uses for the former  
56 Hamm Talc mine and reimagining the elementary school. At the  
57 same time, we are evaluating whether our budget fairly supports  
58 employees, maintains roads and infrastructure, and plans  
59 thoughtfully for the future, all while balancing the need for fiscal  
60 responsibility.

61 As we look to the future, we must recognize the people  
62 who are the backbone of Windham today, those who volunteer  
63 on the town's committees and offices. Their effort and dedication,  
64 often unseen, are the modern-day equivalent of refining wood  
65 into potash.

66 Today, the Meeting House stands as a reminder of the  
67 enduring strength of community and the lasting impact of  
68 collective effort. Just as the farmer once transformed ash into  
69 lasting community infrastructure, our volunteers continue that  
70 legacy by shaping Windham's future with their commitment and  
71 care.

72 Now is the time for all of us to engage, to dedicate our  
73 experience, energy, and time to the town's committees, offices,  
74 and initiatives. In doing so, we honor the spirit of those who  
75 came before us and help ensure Windham continues to flourish  
76 for generations to come.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

77           **MICHAEL PELTON**, a farm owner and operator and  
78 engaged community member, serves on the Windham  
79 Selectboard.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

*LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:*

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LINKS:

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81

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VIDEO:

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82

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

83

####END LOGLINE####