

Did You Know That...?

Explorations into Walpole People, Places & History with Ray Boas

...following Franklin Pierce's election as President in 1852, Walpole held a special Town Meeting, while celebrating its 100th Anniversary, to decide how to honor its native son? Aware that 50 years earlier residents of Cheshire, Massachusetts, presented a Mammoth Cheese to President Thomas Jefferson, the townspeople voted to top that gift.

In July 1801, John Leland of Cheshire (the only Berkshire County resident to support Jefferson), developed a plan to honor the President. He asked all Jefferson supporters to contribute as much milk and curd as they could. He did not want Federalist milk, only that of members of the then Democratic-Republican Party - Jefferson's party.

In his multi-volume biography of Jefferson, Dumas Malone stated the cheese was made from the milk and curd of 900 cows and taken to a mill where a large hoop was placed on a cider press, resulting in a massive cheese press. The townspeople added their ingredients and, after a time, the cheese was ready. Once completed, Leland dedicated the cheese to Jefferson, calling the cheese "the greatest cheese ever put to press in the New World or Old."

The final product supposedly weighed 1,235 pounds, was 4 feet in diameter and 15 inches thick. Most likely the finished cheese was carried

by sleigh to the Hudson River then loaded on a barge. In New York City the mammoth cheese was loaded onto the sloop *Astrea* and taken to Baltimore and then loaded onto a horse-drawn wagon for the final leg to Washington. The Mammoth Cheese caused quite a spectacle on its three-week, 500-mile journey to be presented to Jefferson on January 1, 1802.

At the special Town Meeting in Walpole, the Graves family took the lead and proposed Cheshire's feat be topped. "After all, as a dairy community we have more than the paltry 900 cows Leland commandeered," the then family patriarch proclaimed. Milking began.

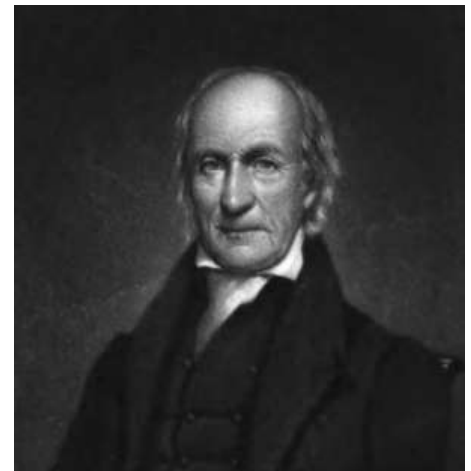
With the railroad having arrived in Walpole in 1849 it provided the means to transport a gift surpassing that of Cheshire. It was voted a larger two-wheeled cheese be shipped to the nation's capital in time for President Pierce's inauguration and be rolled down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House for presentation and devouring. Milk began flowing to one of the mills on what is now Mill Road (of course) between Wentworth Road and what is now Old Keene Road. Two large



Monument to the Mammoth Cheese

Dedicated by The Sons of the American Revolution in 1940, this monument is located in Cheshire, Massachusetts, about a half-mile east of Highway 8 on Church Street.

-Ray Boas photo



Baptist preacher John Leland (1754-1841) was known for his opposition to slavery, and his advocacy to Presidents Jefferson and Madison to maintain strict separation between government and religion. On New Year's Day 1802, Jefferson welcomed Leland and his gift at the White House. Two days later, Leland delivered the Sunday sermon in the House of Representatives, with the President in attendance.

FLORENTINE FILMS

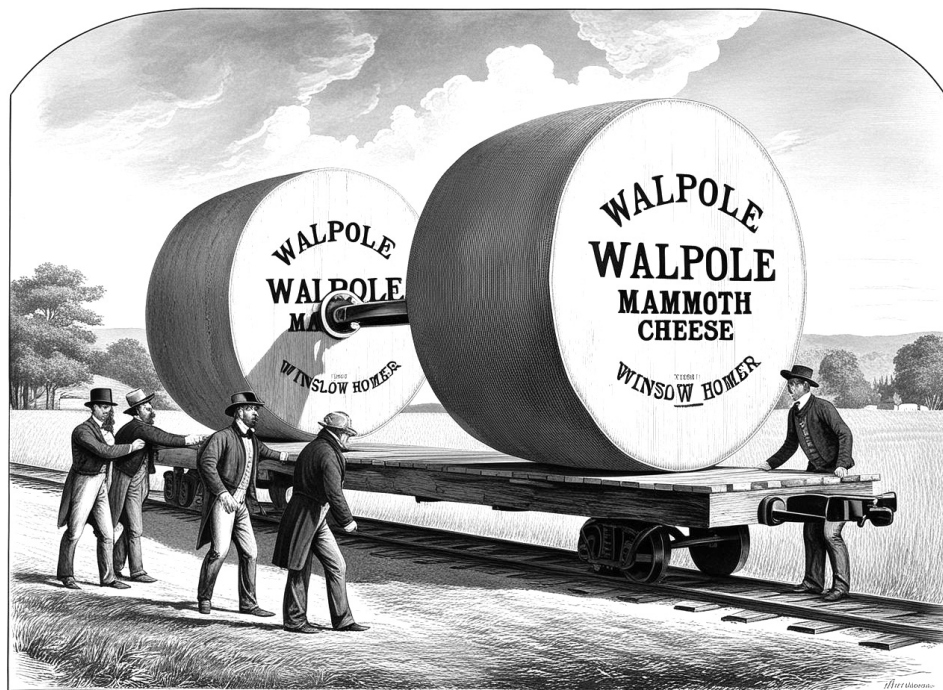
Making films in Walpole
for 40 Years.

round molds were fabricated, and two large presses were constructed to remove excess whey, consolidate cheese curds, and drain the excess liquids. One vague account indicates large cider presses were disassembled and remade to create a wheel of cheese six feet in diameter — a lofty goal, but necessary to not only have a cheese gift larger than the Cheshire folks, but of two cheese wheels joined by an axle for rolling.

Once completed and assembled a southbound train stopped in the area that is now the Walpole Gateway. The two wheels of cheese were pulled up onto a flat railroad car, secured and covered. A contingent of prominent Walpoleans (whose names have sadly been lost to history) alighted a coach for the journey - the exact train route has also been lost over time.

Franklin Pierce's inauguration was reported on page 3 of the March 4, 1853, edition of Washington, DC's *DAILY NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER*. Over a column was taken up with all the details of the inauguration. Unfortunately, in reading and re-reading this account, there is no mention of Walpole's massive Mammoth Cheese.

The Washington paper did not document this feat, but there is hope yet. Having shared this story with several fellow residents it was agreed that again Walpole must top Cheshire, Massachusetts. This time with a larger monument of the Walpole Cheese Press, and its two-wheel creation. The monument will be erected on Route 12 where the cheese was loaded aboard the train at the Gateway just off the old rail bed for all to see and marvel at.



Walpole's Mammoth Cheese by Winslow Homer

In researching this article, the CLARION discovered this previously unpublished lithograph by Winslow Homer. Born in Boston in 1836, Homer's mother was a gifted artist and his first teacher. Growing up in then-rural Cambridge, when he graduated from high school his father apprenticed him to a Boston commercial lithographer where he spent two years producing commercial etchings and sheet music. In 1857 he began his freelance career opening his first studio in Boston. Besides his nautical paintings, he is known for his Civil War etchings done for *Harper's Weekly*.

Found in a small collection of young Homer's early papers with this illustration, a note indicates he heard of Walpole's Mammoth Cheese and its upcoming trip to be gifted to President Pierce. Not able to travel to Walpole, he created his concept of the two wheeled "mammoth" cheese, and from his notes submitted it to the *Keene Sentinel's* predecessor for publication. The paper obviously felt Homer's "mammoth" depiction enormously overstated and did not publish it.

-Ray Boas



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NATIONAL DRUG TAKE BACK DAY

Saturday, April 26, 2025

Collection Sites:

Walpole Police Department 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
4 Russell Street, North Walpole, NH

Walpole Recycle Center 10:00 am – 2:00 om
207 Whitcomb Road, Walpole, NH

2024 - 128 pounds collected
2023 - 60.5 pounds collected
2022 - 79.4 pounds collected