



OCTOBER 2014

# Hampton Falls

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## Featured Home

### The Governor's Mansion, 65 Brown Road

By resident George Blaisdell

Sunnyside, The Governor's Mansion, is the embodiment of the imagination and dreams of the distinguished wife of the Honorable Warren Brown, Sarah Norris Brown.

The Brown family has been in Hampton Falls since the first settlers in the 1600's. Though "Sunnyside" is not officially designated a historic landmark, its lineage and strong presence in the community made it such. The idea of "Sunnyside," a grand gentleman's farm, first came to Sarah during the winter of 1879 when she began to create her wish list for the perfect home.

The long January nights were the perfect environment for her to visualize her dreams. Sketching and writing for months she eventually came to the point when the skills of an architect were needed to finally bring the home to life. After the usual spring-time chores to prepare the farm were over, and growing season was in full swing, Sarah boarded her horse drawn carriage and made the 2 hour long trip to Newburyport, Massachusetts to meet with a cutting edge architect.

Sarah had the perfect parcel in mind, property Warren had bought from his father that had an aging Center Chimney Colonial on it, a house that was better replaced than repaired in Sarah's mind. Luckily, that same sentiment didn't prevail for her dream home 120 years later, or it would have lived on just in the history books. Sarah's passion would build something far beyond a wood and plaster structure, Sarah would build a home with a heart and life of its own. The final plans were to create a 28-room state of the art Victorian Mansion the likes of which the New Hampshire seacoast had never seen.

When Warren and Sarah would take trips to Boston, or even Washington, DC, they would marvel at the technology especially

the gas lighting the cities had. They both thought what a remarkable convenience, the ability to turn lights on and off on demand, this has to be a feature of "Sunnyside." Sarah and Warren also talked about running water and provisions were made in the design to incorporate that in the future. Gas lighting and running water in every bedroom were huge innovations in 1880, virtually unheard of and non-existent on New Hampshire's seacoast. "Sunnyside" would be the first to have these lavish amenities. In 1880 as "Sunnyside" was being constructed Warren Brown ran for Governor of New Hampshire and lost in a close race to Charles Bell. However, as "Sunnyside" was being built in the midst of his campaign the home took on a second name as "The Governor's Mansion."

The 28 planned rooms would be built upon a granite foundation with a full-bricked basement and an indoor well. The basement was room upon room for Sarah's wines, preserves, ciders, vegetables and more. The first floor had a kitchen with plenty of room for preparing, preserving and cooking, a formal parlor and grand main hall for entertaining, a highly detailed and ornate dining room to showcase Sarah's culinary skills and, of course, a posh office for politicking for Warren. The second floor for family and servant bedrooms, the third floor for storage and pool table/men's gathering room all topped off with a tower that overlooked the entire property. This tower would become Sarah's special place, she would be known to sit and sew in the tower for hours on end. As the years passed,





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and the farm flourished, the dream of running water became a reality in 1902 when the windmill was built. With its 4 floors the windmill stood 48 feet high to the deck upon which the blade apparatus sits, the total height with blades brought it to approximately 63 feet, tall making it one of the tallest structures on the Seacoast.

The well below the windmill is the deepest hand-dug well of record in New Hampshire going down 60 feet and having a diameter of 12 feet. In addition to the windmill supplying water to the farm and its over 30 out-buildings, it powered machinery with big pulley's and belts on the first floor. Sunnyside flourished as a farm until Sarah's death in January of 1917. Warren died 2 years later in September of 1919. When Sarah died much of what made "Sunnyside" died with her.

The Brown children continued to live at "Sunnyside" but its heartbeat had clearly changed without Sarah, with

its matriarch gone a general malaise fell over "Sunnyside." Slowly, years of neglect would fall upon this once shining star of the seacoast. Weather, time and most importantly the loss of Sarah's love for this iconic home took its toll on everything that was "Sunnyside." Buildings collapsed, weeds and brush took over the fields and grounds and the heartbeat of "Sunnyside" was almost gone. The windmill apparatus was ripped from atop the structure by the "Great New England Hurricane of 1938" and by the late 1950 "Sunnyside" was abandoned and alone.

In the early 1960 "Sunnyside" was sold from the Brown Family, "Sunnyside" was now a conspicuous reminder of a bye gone era and in serious disrepair. The new owners tried to mend and modernize this once technological marvel. The mansions rotting brackets, corner coins and medallions that adorned the home in such grandeur were removed and replaced with

dark brown cedar shakes. The new owners, instead of bringing "Sunnyside" back to life, created the classic image of the local "haunted house." Perched atop a hill and shrouded in trees, "Sunnyside" now appeared large, dark and menacing; it was not long before the legend would be born.

The new owners tried to modernize and stayed a number of years to the early 1970's when "Sunnyside" was suddenly left empty and abandoned again. As the story continues, this was at the end of the hippie movement in the late 1960's and early 70's, and the empty "Sunnyside" quickly became a makeshift commune for these hippies. In 1975 David and Jeanne Wright moved in with their children. The Wrights lived at "Sunnyside" for 25 years and they then sold the property to George and Michelle Blaisdell in 2000. "Sunnyside" was being sold as part of a subdivision; the land had become much more valuable than this once great home.

continued... on page 26

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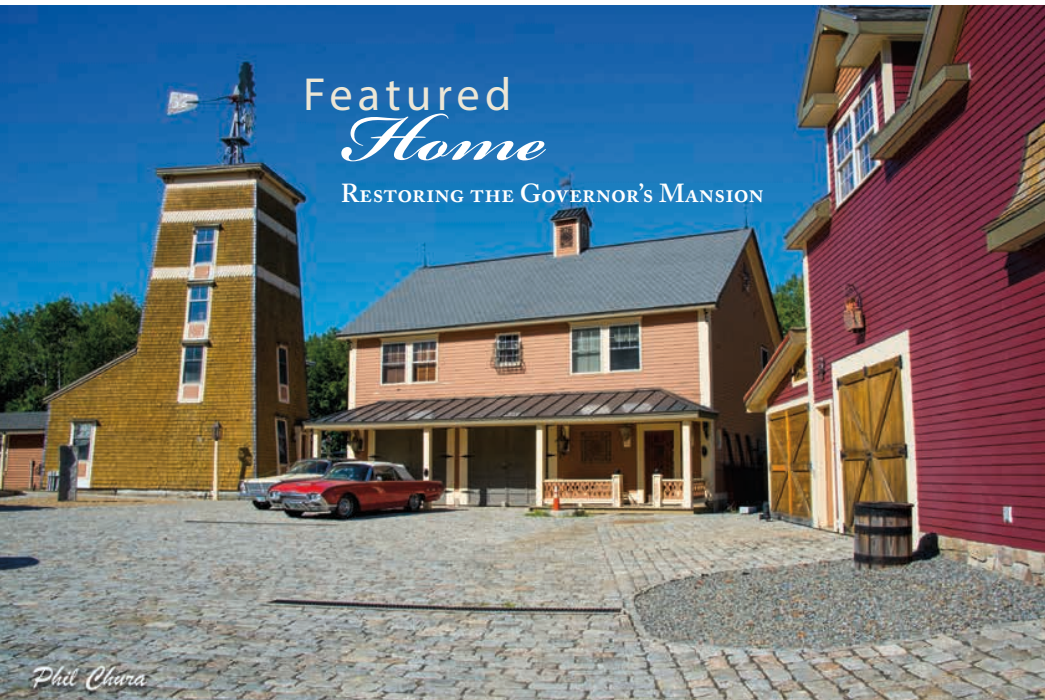
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## Featured Home

### RESTORING THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION



Phil Chura

...continued from page 20

In 1999 George and Michelle had no plans to move from their current home, their home was new and most importantly it was completely done. In July of that year George had an accident while white water rafting leaving him with a massive concussion and an almost total loss of his eyesight. George, in a unique coincidence that coincided with the accident, heard about "Sunnyside" being for sale and went directly from the Exeter Hospital neurology department to "view" the home. "George is temporarily blind and he wanted to look at a house!" Michelle surely thought the concussion was affecting George's brain and not just his vision.

George says, "From the moment Michelle led me through the front door I felt at home, a sense of belonging like I have never felt before – this is no coincidence, this is my home." When asked about the home George says, "Had I been able to see how much work needed to be done, I would never have taken on such a project, blind was the only way I would have ever bought 'Sunnyside', it was destiny."

After the initial visit an offer was made and shortly thereafter accepted for the sale of "Sunnyside." Michelle having her eyesight and 20/20 vision was distraught at the prospect of owning

a structure or structures in so much need of obvious repair. To say many tears were shed at the purchase of this home is an understatement.

Other buyers fell in love with "Sunnyside", as well, during the year that "Sunnyside" was in the process of subdivision approval countless offers came in each time growing in value to purchase the sales agreement. Even on the day of the real-estate closing a check for several hundred thousand dollars was presented from a broker to purchase the sales agreement from George and Michelle one last time. George says, "It wasn't even a thought, it was the easiest money I have ever turned down; 'Sunnyside' is not just any house, it's my home."

George and Michelle jumped in with both feet to the restoration; there was not one easy project they will soon learn. They would soon find that one project led to another, then another. In early 2000 there might have been 4 or 5 separate projects that all tied together, Michelle was going crazy! 120 windows in the house and the windmill were replaced, the leaking roofs were repaired, the old wiring removed and replaced, and a high efficiency heating system was brought in. In the restoration nothing was ever wasted, as much material as possible was recycled.



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The windmill's first floor interior

The original barn and carriage house were rotten beyond repair; each disassembled board by board to reuse as much as possible in the reconstruction. These materials were used both structurally were able and aesthetically were necessary.

The windmill had severe water damage because it was leaking since it was built, due to the pump piston going through the roof. The actual frame of the windmill, like the house, was built with southern yellow pine and was in remarkably great shape. In the main house the kitchen floor sagged 6 inches in the middle and had to be brought up.

The kitchen design couldn't have been more out dated; the old brick hearth was changed in the 1960's to something that looked like it belonged in the rumpus room on the Dick Van Dyke show. The kitchen alone was a massive undertaking!

George Blaisdell is an Insurance Broker by trade and in addition to the myriad of contractors he's had, George himself had to become a carpenter, plumber, electrician, roofer, mason, and whatever else was required to restore "Sunnyside" to the grand home it once was. George also comments that, "I couldn't do what I've been doing without the help of certain people. I somehow have surrounded myself with great people who are artisans and care as much about Sunnyside as I do. The pulse of 'Sunnyside' is back and beating strong!"

The restoration is always on the mind of people George and Michelle meet, but equally are the questions about its leg-

end, "Is it really haunted?" George and Michelle have lost count of how many times people will tell them about the old lady in the tower, "She is there then she's gone!" or share their own ghost story or two about 'Sunnyside.'" When the Wright family comes back to visit, the first question is, "What ghost sightings can you tell us about?" It's not if, but how many.....

The "Sunnyside" restoration will continue with the same love Sarah Brown had in 1879 when she initially brought to life the idea which is "Sunnyside." In an era of "Mc-Mansions" Sarah's dream stands as a reminder that there is so much more to a home than square footage and Viking appliances, a home surrounds you, defines you, and is at the very essence of whom you are and who you will become.

Thank you Sarah.

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