

New Technology Helps Open Doors To The World Of Vintage Maps

By **CASSIE HORNER**, News Correspondent

In the spring, my husband and I drove to Guildhall, a tiny village in the Northeast Kingdom on the shore of the Connecticut River. My hope was to track down the location of the farm where my great great-grandparents, Harrison and Betsy Gage, lived in the 1850s. The town office had a map of the old lots so I easily determined that Lot 15 was in the southeast corner of Guildhall. The tough question was how to get to it.

Good fortune smiled on us that day when the town clerk hooked us up with a man named Art who just happened to be in the office grieving his property assessment. He knew the vicinity of Lot 15 but didn't know how to tell us to get there, since that part of town is a wilderness today. "Follow me home," he finally offered. "I'll take you up there in my ATV."

Thanks to Art's generosity and knowledge of the land, we found the probable corner marker of Lot 15 as he drove us through miles of old roads for a couple of hours. We even saw a black bear lumber across the path a few hundred feet ahead of us.

That experience of a few months ago took on a new dimension this past week because of easy computer access to an 1856 map of Guildhall. Written in elegant script in the southeast corner of the map is "H. Gage," showing the spot where this long-ago homestead once stood. Nearby are the farms of three of Betsey's sisters and their husbands. To say I was excited by this information is an understatement. It made the trip to Guildhall even more vivid.

There is more where the map of Guildhall came from, thanks to the painstaking work of map lover Dave Allen of West Chesterfield, NH. In fact, he has reproduced old maps on CD for the towns in all of Vermont's counties from Windham up to Orleans. He also has reproduced maps for New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The format allows the user to browse each town and enlarge each map for close scrutiny of the thousands of names of residents of Vermont in the mid-19th century. This is a boon to amateur historians, genealogists, and hikers curious about all of the

cellar holes that stud the wooded landscape.

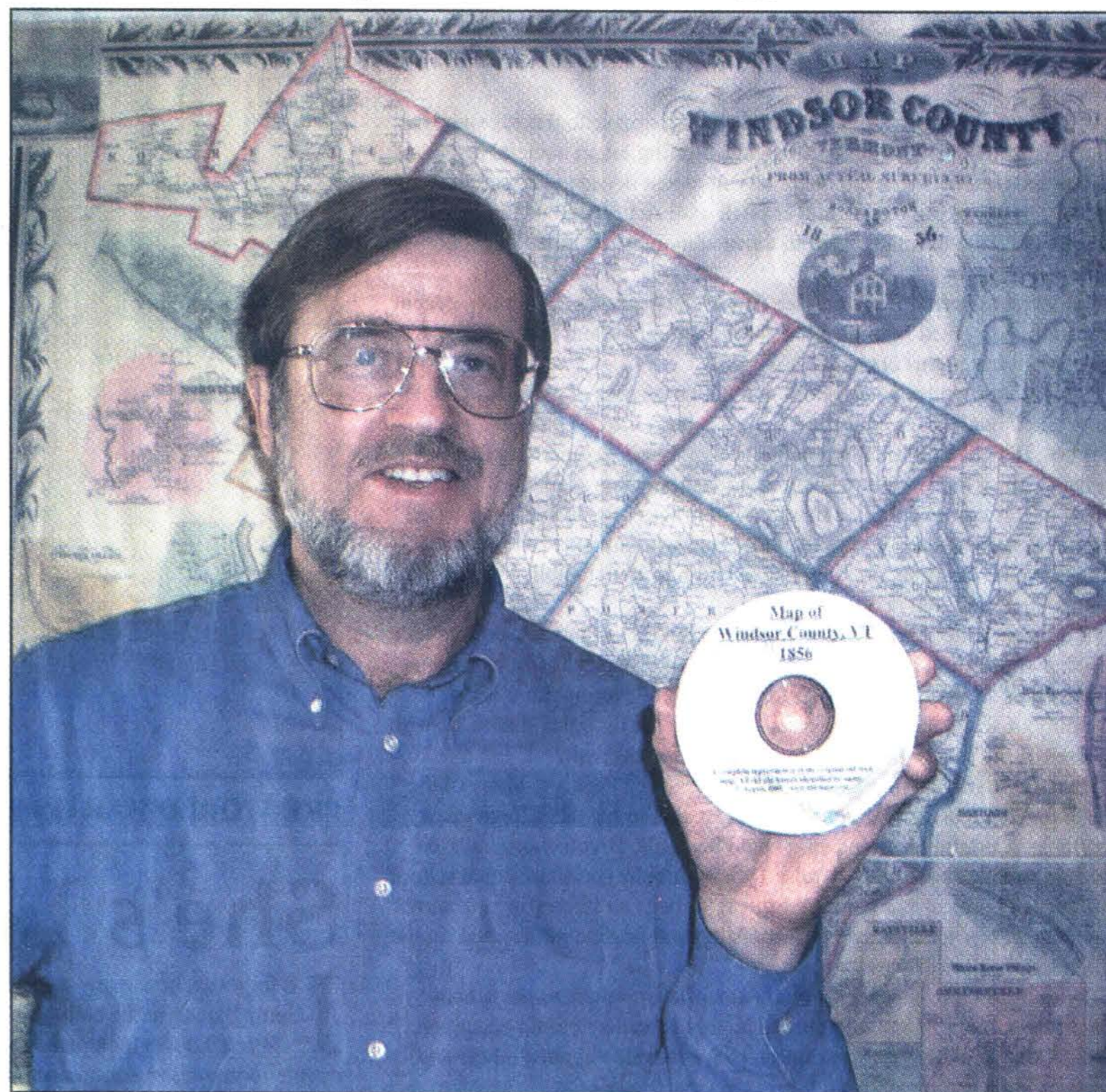
Allen owns a surveying and mapping business in NH. "Surveyors and lawyers use old maps a lot when doing deed research," he explained. "Old deeds for many properties in Vermont (use language such as) the old oak tree and the land of Joseph Smith." The question becomes, where is this really located? Not only do the old maps help determine this, but they also can shed light on ownership of properties for the previous decades. The era of the 1850s bridged a relatively static period of land ownership with the major emigration out of Vermont in the period of the Civil War and the coming of the railroad.

Asked about the origins of his interest in old maps, Allen said, "Hiking. In the woods I would see old foundations. I discovered maps showing who lived in those cellar holes. As it happens I have ancestors scattered throughout Vermont." Last weekend, Allen sought out some of those ancestors in Pomfret. He did computer overlays of four maps -- the 1856 map, a modern road map, and modern and old topographical maps -- to help narrow down the location of the two O.R. Leonard homesteads marked on the 1856 map. (The Windsor County map is based on surveys done by Hosea Doton, a 19th Century surveyor, engineer and teacher who still has relatives around here). Allen also relied on help from a local resident who happens to be a distant relative.

The result of Allen's search was a success. He found the two sites, both with buildings still on them. One is the original 1800s house and the other is a big barn of later vintage. An old house on the second site was destroyed in recent decades by fire.

The old maps also come into play in the recurring arguments across Vermont about the status of old roads. Towns such as Barnard have faced serious turmoil over whether old roads should be discontinued or kept for public use. "Part of the evidence used is these old maps," Allen said.

The series of old maps can be ordered online at www.old-maps.com. For more information, call Allen at (413) 772-2801 or write him at Old Maps, PO Box 54, West Chesterfield, NH 03466.



(Photo Courtesy Dave Allen)

DAVE ALLEN has reproduced old maps on CD that are available for purchase.