

A Friend to Vermonters in the Famine Year



If you read the story on the year 1816, you know that times were hard and crops failed all over Vermont. But hard times brought out the best in some people. A wealthy farmer, Squire Thomas Bellows, lived fifteen miles up the Connecticut River in Walpole, New Hampshire. He managed to raise a good crop of corn and had all that he needed for his own use. He sold the rest at the same low price as in years of plenty. Since many people did not have money, he let them pay in labor. Many Vermonters are said to have been helped by him. In fact, he turned no one in need away.

But when a speculator wanted to buy all the corn to resell at a high price, the squire refused, saying "If you want a bushel for your family, you can have it at my price, but no man can buy of me to speculate in this year of scarcity." Some years later, the story was made into this poem.

The Old Squire by George B. Bartlett

In the time of the sorrowful famine year
When crops were scanty and bread was dear,

The good Squire's fertile and sheltered farm
In the valley nestled secure from harm:

For the Walpole hills, in their rugged might
Softened the chill winds deathly blight,

So the sweet Connecticut's peaceful stream
Reflected the harvest's golden gleam:

And the buyers gathered with eager greed
To speculate on the poor man's need:

But the good Squire said "It is all in vain;
No one with money can buy my grain;

But he who is hungry may come and take
An ample store for the giver's sake.

The good old man to his rest has gone,
But his fame still shines in the golden corn,

For every year in its ripening grain,
The grand old story was told again.