

## 2d. Facts and Questions About *Our Town*\*

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### Facts

#### Place: Grover's Corners

It is Grover's Corners in Sutton County, New Hampshire, United States of America.

Grover's Corners is located "just across the Massachusetts line" at "latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes."

Grover's Corners is situated on Pleistocene granite from the Appalachian Mountains as well as Devonian basalt, Mesozoic shale, and "sandstone outcroppings," making the town "some of the oldest land in the world."

Members of the Cotahtatchee tribes occupied the land Grover's Corners sits on beginning in the tenth century CE.

English colonizers settled in Grover's Corners toward the end of the seventeenth century CE.

A population of Slavic and Mediterranean immigrants lives in Grover's Corners.

As of Act One, Grover's Corners has a population of 2,642 (including the pair of Polish twins that were born overnight).

The local Grover's Corners government operates through a Board of Selectmen. Men over twenty-one can vote; women vote "indirect."

Grover's Corners is "lower middle class" with a "sprinkling of professional men."

Ten percent of the population of Grover's Corners is made up of "illiterate laborers."

The population of Grover's Corners is eighty-six percent Republican, six percent Democratic, four percent Socialist, and four percent "indifferent."

The population of Grover's Corners is eighty-five percent Protestant, twelve percent Catholic, and three percent "indifferent."

According to Mr. Webb, ninety percent of high school graduates in Grover's Corners continue to live in Grover's Corners.

\* The answers to some questions are included next to their respective question; these answers are italicized and encased in parentheses.

There is Main Street.

There is a railway and railroad station.

There is Polish Town, where marginalized families live.

There are six churches in Grover's Corners—Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist, Unitarian, Baptist, and Catholic.

There is Town Hall, the Post Office, and the jail.

There is a grocery store.

There is a drugstore, owned by Mr. Morgan.

There is a public school and a high school.

There are two houses featured in the play—the Gibbs' and the Webb's.

Both houses have a garden.

There is a cemetery.

There is a "new hospital" that was named after Dr. Gibbs' death in 1930.

There is a blanket factory, owned by the Cartwright family.

There is Lake Sunapee.

There is Lake Winnepesaukee.

There are the White Mountains.

There is Mount Washington.

There is Mount Monadnock, around which are the towns Jaffrey, East Jaffrey, Peterborough, Dublin, and Grover's Corners.

### **People: Grover's Corners**

There is the Cartwright family, currently the richest family in Grover's Corners.

The Cartwrights date back to 1670-1680.

There is the Gibbs family—Frank, Julia, George, and Rebecca.

The Gibbises date back to 1670-1680.

There is the Webb family—Charles, Myrtle, Emily, and Wally.

There is the Grover Family.

The Grovers date back to 1670-1680.

There is the Hersey family.

Mrs. Gibbs was a Hersey before marrying Dr. Gibbs.

There is the Crowell family—Joe Jr., Si, and their parents.

The following people and families are mentioned by other characters in *Our Town*, but never have onstage appearances:

- Shorty Hawkins, who works at the Grover’s Corners railroad station
- The recently married school teacher Martha Foster
- Mrs. Goruslawski, mother to newborn twins in Polish Town in Act 1
- The Lockharts
- Mrs. Wentworth and Grandmother Wentworth, related to the Gibbs and/or the Herseys
- Hester Wilcox, cousin to Mrs. Gibbs
- Silas Peckham, whose cow pasture contained fossils now on display at Professor Willard’s museum at the State University
- Ellery Greenough, who owns a stable most farmhands in Grover’s Corners “holler some” and drink at on Saturday nights
- Emily and George’s friends and classmates: Lois, Louise, Ernestine, Helen, Fred, Bob, Herb, Lizzy, and Stew
- Emily’s teacher, Miss Corcoran
- George’s Uncle Luke, owner of the farm George will eventually take over once he marries Emily
- Mamie Cartwright
- Fred Hersey, who is set to get married the next Tuesday in Act 1
- Jane Trowbridge, who got married a month prior to Act 1
- Mrs. Fairchild, one of the “people up that part of town” have begun locking their house doors at night from a fear of burglars
- Jane Crofut, a classmate of Rebecca Gibbs
- Hank Todd, a former baseball player from 1884 who went on to become a parson in Maine

- Mrs. Slocum
- Tom Huckins, who drives the hardware store wagon “like a crazy man”
- Farmer McCarty, who suffered from lumbago (lower back pain) when alive—may be one among the dead in Act 3
- Carey Craig—Mrs. Gibbs’ sister, Emily’s cousin-in-law, Sam Craig’s mother
- Mrs. Carter, widow to Mr. Carter (among the dead); she watches Emily and George’s son during Emily’s funeral
- Emily’s Aunt Norah
- Joel, a sailor who “knew” all the stars—son of one of the men among the dead

## Act 1

There is no curtain and no scenery.

The Stage Manager narrates *Our Town* and directly addresses the audience.

*Our Town* is a play.

*Our Town* was written by Thornton Wilder.

This production of *Our Town* has real-life producers, a director, and actors.

Act 1 is titled “Daily Life” and “shows a day in our town.”

It is May 7, 1901.

It is a Tuesday.

It is just before dawn—seven o’clock.

The Gibbs and Webb families are neighbors.

The Gibbs and Webb gardens both grow corn, peas, beans, hollyhocks, heliotrope, and burdock. The Webb garden also contains sunflowers.

Certain props and elements used by characters are “imaginary” and “invisible” (e.g.

Joe Crowell Jr.’s newspapers, Howie Newsome’s horse).

Joe Crowell Jr. delivers the Grover’s Corners *Sentinel* in Act 1.

Joe Crowell Jr. has a knee that “tells [him] when it’s going to rain.”

The Stage Manager notes that Joe Crowell dies in France during “the war.”

Mrs. Gibbs makes frequent mention of going away to someplace for “rest,” likely due to her dream of visiting Paris, France.

George has been acting irresponsibly around the Gibbs household and has ignored chores like chopping wood.

George is a baseball player and baseball fanatic.

George and Rebecca Gibbs are bickering siblings.

George has a twenty-five cent weekly allowance, which he spends recklessly.

The Gibbises own and raise chickens.

Mrs. Webb has been recovering from a cold that still affects her ability to sing in tune at choir practice at the Congregational church.

Mrs. Gibbs was visited by a “second-furniture [man] from Boston” the previous Friday.

The salesman inquired about Mrs. Gibbs’ highboy; he offered \$350 to purchase it.

The highboy belongs to Mrs. Gibbs’ Grandmother Wentworth.

Mr. Gibbs is a Civil War hobbyist and buff; he has taken trips to battlefields like Antietam and Gettysburg with Mrs. Gibbs.

Mr. Webb is a Napoleon hobbyist and buff.

The Stage Manager can interrupt scenes and change the action to different scenes.

The Stage Manager voices Mrs. Forrest in Act 1.

George and Emily can see and talk to each other from their respective bedroom windows.

The Grover’s Corners time capsule is laid in the cornerstone of the town’s soon-to-be-built bank; it contains a copy of the *New York Times*, the *Grover’s Corners Sentinel*, the Bible, the Constitution of the United States, and one or more of William Shakespeare’s plays. The Stage Manager also adds a published copy of *Our Town* to the time capsule. The capsule is treated to last one thousand years.

Simon Stimson directs the Congregational Church choir and plays the organ.

Dr. Gibbs raises George’s weekly allowance another twenty-five cents because “[he’s] getting older.”

Dr. Gibbs also raises Rebecca's allowance out of fairness.

Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Webb, and Mrs. Soames all sing in the choir at the Congregational Church; they all gossip about Simon Stimson's drinking problem.

According to Mrs. Gibbs, he "people up that part of town" have begun locking their house doors at night from a fear of burglars.

Simon Stimson's drinking problem is related to the "peck of trouble" he has been through.

## **Act 2**

Act 2 is titled "Love and Marriage."

It is July 7, 1904.

It is a Thursday.

It is after High School Commencement.

Emily and George have graduated high school.

Emily and George are getting married.

It was raining earlier.

Si Crowell delivers the Grover's Corners *Sentinel* in Act 2.

Mrs. Webb and Mr. Webb both believe in different wedding superstitions.

Mr. Webb wants to raise chickens, much to Mrs. Webb's consternation.

The Stage Manager flashes the scene back in time to when George and Emily confessed their love for one another.

George was elected President of the Junior Class and will be President of next year's Senior Class.

Emily was elected Secretary and Treasurer of the Junior Class and will be Secretary and Treasurer of next year's Senior Class.

The Stage Manager plays Mr. Morgan.

George considered going to State Agriculture School, but abandoned those plans to stay with Emily.

The Stage Manager flashes forward back to the wedding.

The Stage Manager plays the Congregational Church minister.

Emily and George both experience last minute hesitancy at the wedding, but console each other and go through the ceremony.

### **Act 3**

Act 3 has no title, but the Stage Manager notes in Act 2 that “I reckon you can guess what [Act 3 is] about.”

It is the summer of 1913.

It is the cemetery.

Emily and George have settled in Uncle Luke’s farm.

Automobiles (or “Fords”) are becoming more heavily used than horses in Grover’s Corners.

Most of the townspeople have begun locking their house doors at night from a fear of burglars.

The cemetery contains Daughters of the American Revolution, Pilgrims from the Mayflower, and Civil War veterans, among others.

Mrs. Gibbs has died; she died between 1910-1911 of pneumonia while visiting Rebecca Gibbs and her husband in Canton, Ohio.

Wally Webb has died; he died between 1910-1913 of a burst appendix while on a Boy Scout camping trip to Crawford Notch, New Hampshire.

Simon Stimson has died; he died of suicide by hanging.

Mrs. Soames has died between 1904-1913.

Constable Warren has died between 1904 and 1913.

Emily has died; she died in childbirth for her second son that summer.

Simon Stimson’s epitaph is a set of musical notes.

When alive, Mrs. Gibbs sold the highboy from Act 1 and left the money in her will as a legacy to Emily and George.

Emily and George bought a Ford vehicle for the farm.

According to the play, the dead “can go back [to life] and live all those days over again.”

According to the dead, returning to life is “not what you think it’d be.”

The Stage Manager speaks directly to Emily and the dead (that is, as the Stage Manager, not as another character).

The Stage Manager helps Emily return to the living; she chooses to return to her twelfth birthday on February 11, 1899—a Tuesday.

Emily realizes that humans “don’t have time to look at one another while alive.

## Questions

### Place: Grover’s Corners

Where is Sutton County, New Hampshire? (*Upon further research, Sutton County does not appear to exist. However, there is a town in New Hampshire named Sutton, which lies in Merrimack County.*)

Where is “latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes?” (*Upon further research, these coordinates are located in the water of the Atlantic Ocean within a bay off the coast of Massachusetts.*)

When was the Pleistocene epoch? When was the Devonian period? When was the Mesozoic era? (*The Pleistocene epoch lasted from 2.58 million to 11,700 years ago; the Devonian period lasted from about 420 million to about 360 million years ago; and the Mesozoic Era lasted from about 252 million to about 66 million years ago.*)

What is the Cotahatchee tribe? (*The Cotahatchee tribes seem to have been invented by Thornton Wilder.*)

What is a Congregational church? (*The term Congregational generally refers to a non-denominational Protestant faith.*)

What is a board of selectmen? (*Boards of Selectmen function as the executive branch of local New England government; a typical board is composed of about three members voted on by a town’s adult population.*)



What does “English brachiocephalic blue-eyed stock mean?” (*Brachiocephalic is perhaps a misprint of the term brachycephalic, which refers to the head shapes of white people—that is, with broad, short heads.*)

What is MacPherson’s gauge for measuring “mortality and birth rates?”

## Act 1

Who is the Stage Manager?

At what point in time is the Stage Manager narrating? The present?

Who can see the Stage Manager as he narrates?

What are hollyhocks? What is heliotrope? What is burdock? (*Hollyhocks are a kind of tall flower. Heliotrope is a kind of flower that blooms in bunches. Burdock is a kind of flower with edible roots.*)

Can one’s knee detect when rain is approaching? (*Decreased barometric pressure can result in aching knees, hence how Joe is able to forecast rainy weather.*)

What is “the war”? (*“The war” refers to World War I.*)

How much is twenty-five cents worth today? How much was it worth in 1938 when *Our Town* premiered? (*Twenty-five cents is worth \$9.19 today. Twenty-five cents was worth forty-one cents in 1938?*)

How much is \$350 in 1901 worth today? How much was it worth in 1938 when *Our Town* premiered? (*\$350 in 1901 is worth \$12,680.73 today. \$350 in 1901 was worth \$580.59 dollars in 1938 when Our Town premiered.*)

Are the characters in *Our Town* aware they are actors?

What/where is State University? (*State University likely refers to the University of New Hampshire.*)

What is the Monroe Doctrine?

What is the Louisiana Purchase?

How old is Simon Stimson?

How old is Mrs. Soames?

What is Simon Stimson’s “peck of trouble?” Is it still ongoing?

## **Act 2**

How old is Si Crowell?

What is the Philo System of “raising chickens?” (*Edward W. Philo’s “Philo System of Progressive Poultry” explains the basics of raising chickens; by 1910, it had sixteen editions.*)

What/where is State Agriculture College? (*State Agriculture College refers to the University of New Hampshire.*)

## **Act 3**

How did Mrs. Soames die?

How old is Joe Stoddard?

Does Emily’s second child survive?

What do the notes on Simon Stimson’s epitaph play/sound like?

Who are the men and women among the dead?

Is the Stage Manager alive? Was he ever alive?

How did Constable Warren die?