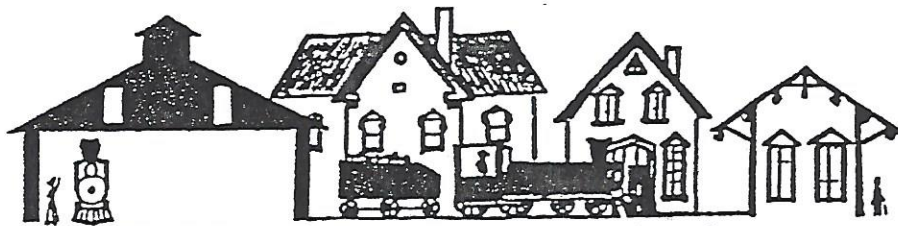


THE ECHO
*NEWSLETTER OF THE ESSEX
HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

SPRING 1998 Vol. 11

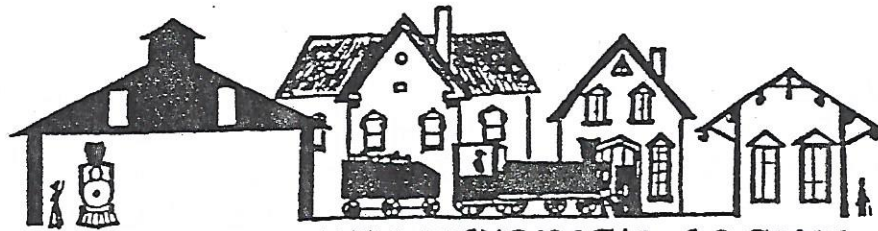
edited by Kathy Dodge



ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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3 Brown's River Road Essex Junction, Vermont 05452



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From the President's Desk

Welcome to our first newsletter of 1998. In this issue new board of directors member, *Diane DiGennaro*, details some early farming memories as shared at the Brownell Library during the "*Tales from the Farm*" evening held recently. *Anne Yandow* writes about a *Memorial Day* memory, and *Betty Tucker* remembers her old house in *Essex* where she lived for 39 years with her husband, Lloyd.

Since our last newsletter the historical society sponsored a community sing on the green before Christmas, a presentation on the shipwrecks of Lake Champlain, and a program on the importance of Mt. Independence during the Revolutionary War.

We have made a contribution to support the publication of "*Picturing the Past, Images Tell Time*," a joint project between some students at Founders Memorial School in Essex and the Shelburne Museum.

Presently a web site is under construction for the Essex Community Historical Society. This will be connected directly to the Town of Essex web site. The site will have the current issue of the *ECHO*, short articles about the history of the Town and the Village, Memorial Hall, the Fair, and Fort Ethan Allen. It will also contain basic information about membership, the museum, and the society.

The Historical Society needs you! The museum will be open on Saturday and Sunday afternoons into the fall. Call *Ann Yandow* at 878-5529, or *Kay Helfrich* at 878-4417 to volunteer at the museum.

The museum sports a new exhibit on the *Roscoe Printing House*. Thank you to *Derek Bratek*, *George Clapp*, and *David Clough* for putting it together.

Our collection of newsletters is incomplete. We are looking for past issues of the *ECHO*, especially from the early years of the historical society. If you have some, please contact me at 878-3853, or *Barbara Mudgett* at 878-5887.

Please donate used items for our tag sale on *Saturday, June 6*, which will be held in front of the museum.

We are always looking for new program ideas, tips on Essex, related artifacts, and articles to publish in the *ECHO* and on the new Internet web site. You can contact any member of the board of directors to express your interest in any of these areas.
Richard Allen, President

ESSEX COMMONS DAY SATURDAY, JUNE 6

This year Commons Day will be celebrated on *Saturday, June 6, beginning at 10:00 AM*. The Historical Society will hold its annual tag sale and the Essex Free Library will hold its annual book, bake and plant sale. This is a wonderful time to come and see your neighbors and friends and talk about the winter past and the summer ahead and invest in your community at the same time! (Not to mention the bargains you will find).

This year the Historical Society hopes to raise enough money to help support special museum-related programs.

Please look through your "treasures" as you do your spring cleaning and put aside some items (in good condition please) to donate to our sale. We ask for small items--no large pieces, broken appliances, books, or plants.

Call *Dick Allen at 878-3853* to make arrangements for your

donations to be picked up or bring them to the museum on *Thursday, June 4 at 7:00 PM*.

Thank you for your generosity and continued support!
Barbara Mudgett

THE RITES OF SPRING



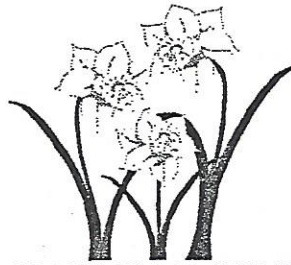
As the calendar pages are turned and the sun goes higher to warm the air making those mounds of snow melt, my thoughts turn to the rites of spring- cleaning the house inside and out (much to my family's dismay), opening windows (take deep breaths, nothing smells like mud season), and making plans to take my grandson to the Memorial Day Parade where he will watch his dad marching proudly with the Essex Junction Volunteer Fire Department.

But I also remember the days I marched in a much different Memorial Day parade. Back in the early fifties, Memorial Day was actually held on Memorial Day. Schools closed and every class was told to be at Lincoln Hall bright and early. The women of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) and VFW Auxiliary were already there. The older women (my grandmother included) would be sitting on wooden folding chairs

surrounded by metal buckets filled with flowers. Residents would come with armloads of lilacs, forsythia, apple blossoms, lily of the valley, tulips, whatever they had blooming in their gardens. It was the job of these older women to tie those flowers into small bouquets. My mother was among the group of women assigned the job of making sure every child had two bouquets.

At the appointed time we were put into formation by class. We always followed the band, the marching veterans, the town dignitaries and the clergy. We marched down Lincoln Street to Holy Family Cemetery, entering through the far gate. A memorial service was conducted, although being in the back, I don't ever remember hearing it! A signal was given and we all ran in different directions looking for a grave displaying a small American flag. Once found, one of our bouquets was reverently placed beside it. Back in our formation, taps was played. We then marched out the near gate, crossed the tracks onto Grove Street and entered the Village cemetery by the back gate. The same thing was repeated and we marched through the front gate onto Main Street back to Lincoln Hall.

In our busy, up-to-the-minute, fast-paced world I wonder what my grandson will remember as his rites of spring.



TALES FROM THE FARM

by Diane DiGennaro

Take a farmer off the farm and what do you get? An evening of entertaining tales about Essex yesteryears. A Farmers' Forum was held in March at the Brownell Library to celebrate National Farmers' Month. The evening was the brainchild of Penny Pillsbury, Library Director, who bills herself as a farm girl with a few stories of her own. She was joined by Jerry Fox, a local historian, who claimed to know nothing about farming but who "loves to dig up arcane facts."

Fox and Pillsbury moderated the forum. It didn't take much prodding to get the likes of farmers *Don Tucker, Ed Whitcomb, Ray Allen, Roland Thompson, Andre Lussier, and Dave and Judy Adams* to tell stories of long ago Essex. Even Junction President George Dunbar had some tales, having worked on a farm in high school.

Essex used to be a real farming town and it looked the part. There were 2 big horse dealers in town. There was a creamery on Rte 2A as well as the Ethan Allen Creamery located behind where Bushey's Auto station now exists. There was a

livery stable where Murray's Tavern now sits. Maynard Auto used to be where a big granary was located. There were several blacksmiths shops. H. C. Baxter corn cannery was located on Elm Street and ran for about 2 weeks straight around fair time.

Whitcomb farm was the largest farm in the area. In 1867 Ed Whitcomb's great-grandfather returned from the Civil War and bought 5 farms which were to become the Whitcomb farm. The farm had 100 cows, all milked by hand.

By the time Ed's father was running the farm, Fort Ethan Allen was active. The farm grew 20 acres of potatoes and sold a great deal of them to feed soldiers at the fort. At that time no one had central heating, so folks would buy hundred of pounds of potatoes and store them in their cellars. The farm also had Holsteins, and grew acres of corn. Folks remember being let out of school early each day to go pick corn and potatoes for the Whitcombs. By the time Ed was growing up, his father had branched out to breeding race horses and built a racetrack at the farm.

In the 1960's Essex became the home to Ray Allen's sugarhouse on Rte 15. At one time he had 1,800 taps. Mrs. Allen did the boiling and Ray fondly refers to her as the "Maple Queen of Essex Junction!"

You can still visit the Allen's sugarhouse. It is now located on Dave and Judy Adams'

farm in Westford. The Adams have been farming for 18 years, but are best known for their turkeys which they've had since 1984.

Ask a farmer about how to have a good time and you're sure to hear about the fair! Mr. Charles Woodlui, a John Deere employee for 33 years, chuckled when remembering the "girlie shows." The local constables would arrest the girls early in the day so they could be back in time for the shows.

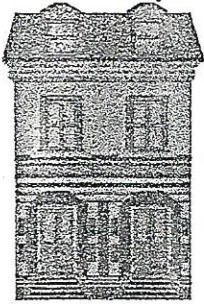
About 50 years ago the fair brought in a dead whale by railcar. They managed to get it just inside the gate and charged \$.50 to see it. The smell permeated the town, but there was always a line waiting to get in to see it.

The fair used to be a grange fair and had a more agricultural theme. Farmers like John Tucker would bring teams of horses for pulling contests. Tucker still travels to about 30 New England fairs a year with his team of horses.

Farmers spoke wryly of the changes they've seen in farming over the years. "It's now very, very competitive, cautioned Ed Whitcomb. "You have to diversify to survive," added Judy Adams.

Competition and diversity may be the focus of farming in the next century, but it will still be the farmers who can tell the tales.

THE HOUSE AT 12 TOWERS ROAD by Betty G Tucker



The red barn stain was dripping down the dry shingles in little rivulets. Two small girls, our daughters, were liberally slapping it on the side of the house, a family project as my husband, Lloyd, and I were also staining. Lloyd manned the old Electrolux vacuum cleaner that had a paint bottle attached to the hose. By reversing the suction on the vacuum a fine spray of stain could be applied. We only did as far as we could reach, leaving the peak for a future time. Years later, I borrowed an extension ladder and did the high part. Staining the house was an on-going project and any willing neighbor or friend was welcome to take a brush and put on some more stain.

For a long time we were under the impression that our house was built about 1840. When talking with Harriet Powell one time, she said she viewed an 1826 map at UVM and found our house on it titled "The Cobbler's Shop", so it had been in that spot much longer than we thought.

The house had many owners. An old tale we liked to tell, although we didn't know if it was true, was about two maiden

ladies who owned the house many years ago, probably in the 18th century. Their names were Butler, so I've been told. They had many cats and when one died they had a taxidermist stuff it and display it on a shelf running around the walls in the living room, until they had quite a collection. Any of our guests who heard this story, shuddered and looked upward toward the walls half expecting to see a row of grinning cats looking down at them. We were sure the house was two separate buildings at one time. In the attic over the kitchen there was an opening in the rough-hewn wood, and a ragged piece of burlap covered it. Drawing the burlap aside, one could see a part of a roof with shingles on it. We thought this was the main part of the house. What further proved our theory was the door from the living room to the kitchen was huge and at least two inches thick. It could have been an outside door.

The living room had what I called a chimney cupboard. The chimney came only part way down the wall and the rest was a cupboard with shelves. We kept board games and art paper in there. We lost this space when we had a central furnace put in in 1957.

The floor in the living room was a curiosity to many. The original floor was plank. Wide boards were over that. No doubt they became worn and a hardwood floor was put on

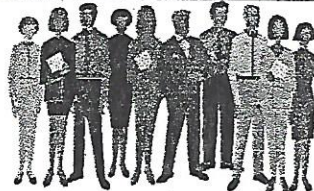
resulting in three floors.
Evidently layering didn't originate
with our generation.

We loved the small plot of
land we had, about 3/4 of an acre.
The rhubarb patch was at least 50
years old and the flower garden at
the end of the house was almost
as old with its phlox and prim-
roses, a bright spot in the spring.
The herb garden by the back
porch was my pride and joy.

The soil was heavy with
clay but very good for root plants
especially the horseradish that
Lloyd processed every spring and
sometimes in the fall. When
working with the soil, we often
found pieces of farm equipment, a
bolt, part of a harrow or pieces of
pottery. At one time it was a farm
with a big barn next to it. There
was a well between the house and
the barn which had been capped.
There was one in the front of the
house also. This one has a round
stone cover. At one time it must
have been a grinding stone for
corn as it had a groove all around
the edge. Neither well was used
after Champlain Water was piped
in.

The old place at 12 Towers
Road sits bleak and empty now, a
testimony of days gone by. It still
holds a tender place in my heart.

*For your information, here are the names
and telephone numbers of current board
members. They would like to hear of your
interest and ideas.*



RICHARD ALLEN 878-3853

BARBARA CHAPIN 879-1145

**EVA AND DAVID CLOUGH
879-0849**

BETTY TUCKER 878-5848

JIM OVERFIELD 879-0549

ANN YANDOW 878-5529

BARBARA MUDGETT 878-5887

DIANE DIGENNARD 878-0276

ALICIA SHANKS 879-4493

DEREK BRATEK 879-7934

KAY HELFRICH 878-4417

RAY REYNOLDS 878-2193

JANE MENDICINO 878-3156

**SEE YOU AT THE MUSEUM
THIS SUMMER.
VOLUNTEERING!**