

# ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE • FALL 2018

**T**he Essex Community Historical Society had a busy year starting with our open house on June 3, 2018.

We also had programs in May, July, August, September, and our Annual Meeting in October. The September program was the dedication of the new Abram Stevens gravestone in the Village Cemetery. We took part in the Vermont Living History & Militaria Expo at the Champlain Valley Fair Grounds with a display about Fort Ethan Allen and the Water Tower. At our Annual Meeting we were entertained by Men at First at the First Congregational Church in Essex Junction.

We welcomed back returning board members, Denise Groll and Thad Wolosinski, and new board member, Justin St. James.

We hosted a garage sale at Fort Ethan Allen, organized by Jerry Fox, to benefit the "Restore the Tower" fund. We are looking for people to plan and host fundraisers to benefit the "Re-

store the Tower" fund. If this is something you are interested in doing to help us with this project, please contact one of our board members. The fundraiser can be as small as a bake sale or as big as a walk-a-thon—what matters is to continually have the project in the public eye and hopefully, raise some funds while having fun. It would be wonderful if we could have a different fundraiser every month. We are a long way from having enough money to do any work on the tower. Any help would be appreciated.

We would also like to thank our supporters, the Town of Essex, the Essex Police Department and the local businesses that made the 2018 Tales & Treasures of Essex series possible by their financial and in-kind support: TD Bank is our major sponsor, National Life Foundation is our series sponsor and Northfield Savings Bank is our program sponsor,

Eva C. Clough,  
President



The Newsletter of the  
Essex Community Historical Society  
Essex and Essex Junction, Vermont

P.O.Box 8388  
Essex, Vermont 05451  
[essexcommunityhistoricalsociety@myfairpoint.net](mailto:essexcommunityhistoricalsociety@myfairpoint.net)

# HONORING ABRAM STEVENS...

“Who was Abram Stevens and what did he do?” This question was asked and answered in a 1964 Suburban List article by Harris Drury, Sr. Harris had grown up in the brick house at 66 Main Street in Essex Junction originally built by Abram Stevens. The main purpose of his three-part article (1) was to draw attention to the poor condition of Lincoln Hall, the architectural masterpiece built by Abram for his son Albert. Lincoln Hall has had many lives and owners since 1820, but Harris Drury would be proud today of how the village has honored Abram’s legacy and lovingly cares for Lincoln Hall at Five Corners.

So, who was this founding father of the southwest corner of Essex which much later became Essex Junction? Abram was in some ways a larger-than-life character, and like his colleagues Ethan and Ira Allen, there is some mystery about his life.

We know that Abram was born in Killingworth, Connecticut, in 1754. He moved to Salisbury, Conn., where he met the Allen clan and other future Vermonters. This led to a long association. During the American Revolution, Abram enlisted in the continental army as a private in the Connecticut state regiment in June/July 1776. Although almost certainly a “Green Mountain Boy” before this enlistment in 1775, Abram’s name does not appear as a soldier in Vermont registers. However, it is documented in several reliable places that he fought with General Montgomery and Seth Warner at the battle of Quebec City in December 1775(2). There is some evidence that Abram may have returned to Vermont after the failed attack on the Quebec citadel with Benedict Arnold’s troops via eastern Vermont, which is one of the great stories of brutal military hardship in American history. He may also have been with Ethan Allen at the taking of Fort Ticonderoga in May of 1775. War records during the revolution are often incomplete. Our best guess is that Abram returned to Salisbury from Vermont more than once, and eventually joined the Allens in the early days of Burlington, Vermont sometime around 1783. There or earlier he met Captain John Collins, whose daughter Lucy became his wife in 1784. Incidentally, Abram’s oldest sister Phebe married Jedidiah Lane, founding father of Jericho (and also from Killingworth, Conn.), and had 11 children, so the histories of

the two towns are closely connected!

Abram had become a skilled builder and joiner at a young age. For the next several years, he built Burlington landmark houses, including the American house, Buell House (Pearl St), the old Sawyer tavern, and later the beautiful 1804 mansion on Main Street, named “Grassemount” by Governor Van Ness’ wife in the 1820’s.

With the end of the revolution in 1780 and danger past, northern Vermont was open to a flood of new arrivals from southern New England and elsewhere. Abram visited Essex in 1783 to scout timber possibilities for a sawmill as a foreman for Ira Allen. Essex was a massive pine forest at that time. He and new bride Lucy moved to Essex in 1784,

first living in a cabin at what is now 203 Main Street in Essex Junction, abutting the Fairview Farm neighborhood. A few years later, about 1790, Abram had a frame house built farther down Main Street, across from what became the Drury Brickyard. In 1860, J.K. Drury rebuilt Abram’s house in brick and it stood watch over the brickyard for over 100 years; it is still privately owned. Abram’s other two village building standouts are Lincoln Hall and the beautiful 1822 brick house at 35 Pearl St, where he lived later in life until his death on March 27, 1826. Family lore passed on by Abram’s granddaughter Mrs. Jane Beach in 1906 has it that Abram burned his own bricks for Lincoln Hall, almost a half-century before the Drury brickyard was in operation!(3)

Every historical mention of Abram Stevens presents him as an upstanding, community-minded, hard working citizen. He and Lucy

had eight children between 1786 and 1807. Abram amassed hundreds of acres in Essex over the years, likely due in large part to his association with the Allens. Abram was the first village-area district school commissioner, donated the land for the village cemetery in 1818, and helped establish the Congregational church in the town in 1802. In 1804, he was chosen with Timothy Bliss and John Johnson (both highly respected citizens) to sort out a land title quagmire created by Ira Allen’s questionable business tactics in the late 1790’s when he embarked on a costly failed mission to secure arms from France using local lands as collateral for the purchase (this story is also shrouded in historical mystery). The three



PHOTO: ALAN LUZZATTO



commissioners set boundary lines which were never seriously questioned thereafter, and the original 1807 Essex map still hangs on the wall of the Town offices.

Another fascinating story of Abram Stevens survives from a 1793 encounter with the English Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, son of King George III, who arrived in Burlington from Quebec to tour New England with a large entourage. Abram was one of four men chosen to accompany the party to Boston as teamsters. They remembered the temperamental prince as a “jolly companion, fairing as they did, and enjoying the pork and beans and nutcakes and cheese as well as any of them.”

Never involved in elective politics, Abram’s associations with the Allens and later with Ira’s arch-enemy Thaddeus Tuttle invite speculation. There is no doubt that Abram, John Collins, and others, were in the Allen’s “inner circle” for many years. But after Ira’s fall from grace (he had to flee to Philadelphia to avoid debtor’s prison in 1805 and was buried there in an unmarked pauper’s grave in 1814, and Ethan was long gone, dying in 1789) Abram pivoted. In 1804, Thaddeus Tuttle hired John Johnson to design, and Abram Stevens to build, the great house which later became Grassemount. Ira Allen believed that Tuttle had swindled him out of his land while he was imprisoned abroad for his arms deal. Many in Essex also hated Tuttle for his lack of forbearance with settlers who owed money; a local posting said “thief blaming thief will do no good..you stole the land, we’ll steal the wood”(4). But build Grassemount Abram did, so was it a case of a job is a job, doesn’t matter who pays as long as they do? Abram’s personal feelings on the Allen-Tuttle rivalry are lost to history.

Fast forward to 2018. Abram’s place in Essex history was secure, but his gravestone was not. 188 intervening years had taken their toll on a once-beautiful monument in the village cemetery, replete with Masonic symbols and engraved imagery. Enter Maureen Labenski, who is Abram’s GGG-granddaughter descended from oldest son Albert Stevens, himself a War of 1812 veteran from Essex. Spearheading

a family and private fund-raising effort with the Essex Community Historical Society, a true likeness of the original stone has been placed in the village cemetery with a plaque to honor Abram. If you get a chance, visit Abram and Lucy in the village cemetery on the knoll close to Main street. As Harris Drury did in 1964, if you listen carefully you might have a similar experience...”On a recent evening, as I passed the village cemetery, a voice spoke to me from the brow of the hill just inside the fence, in the following manner: Hail, friend!” We think Abram and Lucy would be proud of Essex Junction on it’s 125th Anniversary this year; they and others built the foundation of a great community!

## SOURCES:

Shades of Abram Stevens, Harris K. Drury, Sr., Essex Suburban List, 4/23/1964

Soldiers, Sailors, and Patriots of the Revolutionary War—Vermont, Major General Carleton Edward Fisher, Picton Press, Camden, Maine

“A smart old lady—Mrs. Jane T. Beach”, news article, Boston Globe, December 13, 1906. (Mrs. Beach was Abram Steven’s granddaughter)

History of Essex, Frank Bent, for the 1963 bicentennial of Town of Essex

Gazeteer and Business Directory of Chittenden County, Vermont, for 1882-83. Hamilton Child, Syracuse N.Y. 1882

History of Chittenden County, Vermont, William S. Rann, D.Mason and Company, Syracuse , N.Y., 1886

Abram Stevens: His heritage, accomplishments, and legacy. Compiled by Maureen Labenski. Family genealogy, 2018

Hemenway’s Historical Gazeteer, 1871. History of every town in Vermont.

Hannaford has selected us The Essex Community Historical Society to be the beneficiary of their reusable shopping bag program during the month of **November** at the Essex, VT Hannaford store.

As a reminder, this means that every time the reusable **Community Bag** is sold during the month of **November** at the Essex, VT store, ECHS will receive \$1. Thank you in advance for your help!





# GIRL SCOUTS GATHER

BY LAURIE JORDAN

I grew up in Essex in the 50s and 60s when our neighbors were far apart along Route 15 or out on a farm road. Fortunately, I was in the Girl Scout Troop 54, so I could get together with friends for good times after school each week.

Our Brownie troop met at the school near the Essex Center Four Corners. When I was in fourth grade, I could “fly up” to be a Girl Scout. I sewed the new wings on my new green sash and bought the scout beret and uniform. This was when there was only one green book for all Girl Scouts. Then the scouts separated more and I bought a purple “Cadette” book. As Cadettes, we met at our leader’s home at Pages Corners on week-ends.

My Scout leader, Helen Tudhope, lived in the 1822 brick Colonel Page’s home where the first town center was. There used to be a tavern, school, post office, and store right at the corner of Old Stage Road, Brigham Hill Road, and Colonel Page Road. The crossroads’ buildings were first useful for smugglers to avoid tariffs such as on potash, because they could escape from officials in any direction. Later it was probably used for slaves and the Underground Railroad. Like many homes in Chittenden County, there were secret doors and tunnels. At one meeting the girls went down cellar to look at the hide away, but I didn’t think it was polite to leave the meeting. If only I had!

I was chosen to be a patrol leader for my friends in Junior High School so I got to pin the gold cord on my shoulder. I led six girls on a bicycle hike down Colonel Page Road and we turned left onto Chapin Road. At the country roads forks, we were supposed to loop onto Rollin Irish Road and ride up then down on Brigham Hill Road. After some conversation, I led the bikers straight onto the flat gravel road at the intersection. It went to nowhere except big farm fields, on and on. One girl said, “Laurie, I think we should turn back. I think we’re headed to Fairfax”. So we backtracked to the confusing corners and found Rollin Irish Road. The first hill on that dirt road was so steep, we rushed down it and had enough speed to climb right up the next one. What fun! It should have been called Rolling Irish Road instead. All those Essex back roads remain and I have often taken my family on the very same bike rides.



## Hold It!

Girl Scouts arriving at Essex Junction Wednesday were on shooting as well as posing end of picture taking. This group from Canada was well armed with lenses and film.

You see, I still live in Essex and I happily tell about my Scout experiences when I give the school children history tours. We always visit Memorial Hall on Towers Road in the Center. I remember when town meetings were held there, our troop took care of the children and changed diapers while the parents attended the meeting. The wooden floors still creak and the tall windows and high ceiling reveal its historic importance. The 1871 brick hall, built as a memorial to Essex Civil War soldiers, also had church services, a school gym, and many other events since then.

I shared multiple Scout and town events with my closest friends throughout my graded school Girl Scout years. I was excited to be with Troop 54 and march in the parade through Essex Junction and the Five Corners when I was twelve. Essex Town celebrated its history with a parade on its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in June of 1963. Little did I know that in fifty years I would be representing Essex Community Historical Society in the annual Memorial Day Parade down the same route.

I brag about marching in the Bicentennial Parade. **BUT**—my *favorite memory* of all is of the train station near the Junction’s Five Corners and the magnitude of Girl Scouts arriving for the 1962 Senior Girl Scout Round Up. As a local Girl Scout, I was part of the welcoming crowd at the Essex Junction train station. Girls from all over the country stepped off the trains before boarding buses to take them to the 50<sup>th</sup> Girl Scout Round Up at Button Bay State Park. As I elaborate, I will include excerpts from The Burlington Free Press written during the entire event which was from July 18<sup>th</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup> in 1962 and I will use the “Round Up Fact Sheet” from the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.

*“About 1500 spectators in all, . . . Essex Junction and western Vermont residents stood expectantly at the railroad station area. . . .”* [State Troopers were mounted on horses.] *“The Essex Junction High School band, Girl and Boy Scouts added a festival touch. . . . Fifteen buses took large chunks of space as they waited for the girls. . . .”* [I was proud to be a part of the local scouts who helped patrol the area.] *“Flags of the United Nations, state banners, and special billboards decked Railroad Avenue. . . . [Village] firemen . . . joined the police and local Explorer Scouts in controlling Essex Junction’s greatly increased traffic.”* [And that was just the beginning!]





## ***“First Scout Trains Arrive at Essex Junction Wednesday”***

*“Arrival of some 3,000 Girl Scouts at the train depot in Essex Junction will begin with a special train of 20 pullman sleeping cars carrying 504 passengers Wednesday at 9:30 a.m.” [But they finally arrived at 10:55 from five southern states. It was exciting. The music. The noise of the train and crowd. I watched more and more Senior Girl Scouts step down off from each train car.] “A regular train of two coaches will arrive at 1:20 p.m. with 106 . . . from various parts of Canada.” [THEN at 2:00 another special train with 10 more coaches plans to pull in with 550 passengers from six mid-western states. The last of the busy terminal schedule of Girl Scout special train arrivals that Wednesday was at 3:00 with] “13 Pullman sleeping cars and one coach carrying 440 passengers from” [the northwestern United States] “and Alaska.” [The next day] “four more trains will arrive” [with scouts from New England], “California, Nevada, Utah, Hawaii and Guam. . . . Both Central Vermont and Canadian National Diesel locomotives will be used to haul the special trains” [to Essex Junction and Port Henry,*

*N.Y.].*

The rail equipment was stored at St. Albans and Montreal until the end. A total of 10,000 Round Up campers included the teenage girls and 1500 adults from all fifty states and fourteen other countries besides Canada. Later my troop experienced the massive scout gathering and campsites on the 450 acre site at Button Bay. The pavilion which was built for this event is still there. At the end of July, the Girl Scouts boarded the buses and trains to travel back home with many fine memories and new friends. What an historic gathering from so many places right there in front of me at the five sets of tracks! Now there is only one track. You can be sure that I cherish this important Essex History event. And it was all because I was a proud member of Girl Scout Troop 54 with my closest friends and many fine memories.

Information supplied by Burlington Free Press July 18<sup>th</sup> thru July 31<sup>st</sup> in 1962; Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Roundup Fact Sheet; Courtesy of Kathy Reise, an Essex Resident and former G. S. leader who supplied ECHS with her Roundup scrapbook.



**Thank you for your  
donation to the  
Fort Ethan Allen  
Water Tower  
Restoration\*\***

Art and Jan Kilmer

William Parkinson

Patrick Foundation

Texas Roadhouse

**\*\*Donations received March  
25 to September 30, 2018**

## BOOK RELEASE EVENT:

**Saturday, November 10, 10:30 a.m.**  
**At the Dorothy Alling**  
**Memorial Library, Williston**

**New Publication Sponsored**  
**by the Williston Historical Society**

**Reed Brown's 1841 Journey:**  
**America Through the Eyes**  
**of a Vermont Yankee**  
 By Richard H. Allen

In the fall of 1841, Williston native and Essex resident Reed Brown set out on a two-month odyssey with dual goals: to obtain a patent for his improved carriage springs, and to assist his brother Nathaniel, in jail in Ohio. Reed kept a journal that chronicles the dangers and difficulties, as well as some of the pleasures, of travel in that time.

He experienced:

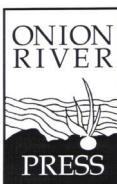
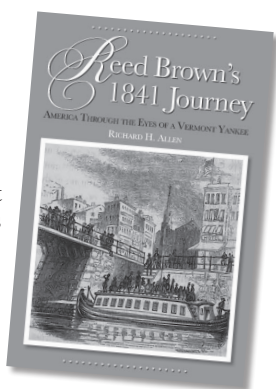
- a steamboat explosion,
- a rail car derailment,
- hours of a bone-jarring stagecoach ride,
- delightful encounters with fellow travelers,
- unhurried travel on canal boats,
- and warm hospitality along the way.

The journal has been transcribed, supplemented with illustrations, and presented in a well-researched historical context that includes reminiscences from more famous writers of the same time period, such as Charles Dickens and Frances Trollope.

Reed's journal was given to the Williston Historical Society in 1982 by Lorraine Brown, a direct descendant. The society sponsored and partially funded this publication. Reed Brown's 1841 Journey: America Through the Eyes of a Vermont Yankee will be available in November at the book release. Also orders can be submitted to Richard Allen, 3 Oakwood Lane, Essex Jct., VT 05452. The cost is \$20.00, plus \$3.00 for shipping.

*"The narrative...created to surround and contextualize the journal entries are chock-full of relevant and interesting information that make the story come alive, help the reader understand Reed's experience, and illuminate the history of the places and people Reed encountered. Bravo for a job well done!"*

— Alan Berolzheimer, Ph.D., editor



## ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES  
 October 2017- September 2018

### REVENUE

Dues .....	535.00
Book sales .....	100.00
Contributions .....	332.00
Town of Essex FY19 Budget .....	1,500.00
Tales and Treasures .....	700.00
Stevens Gravestone Restoration Fund .....	1.69
Interest income .....	39.79
Deaccession .....	0.00
Water Tower .....	8942.54
<b>TOTAL REVENUE.....</b>	<b>12,151.02</b>

### EXPENSE

Echo Newsletter .....	839.75
Postage/PO Box .....	184.00
Vermont Historical Society Dues.....	50.00
Stevens Gravestone Restoration Fund .....	3,599.00
Web page .....	74.80
Sing-a-long .....	100.00
Office supplies .....	16.29
Collection .....	268.00
Exhibits .....	25.00
Insurance .....	654.00
Tales and Treasures .....	62.88
Garden .....	43.43
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES .....</b>	<b>5,917.15</b>

### ACCOUNT BALANCES 9/30/18

General Accounts .....	
Checking .....	2,990.89
Savings .....	653.78

### RESTRICTED ACCOUNTS

CD -- TD Bank .....	4,670.77
Tales and Treasures .....	788.54
Stevens Gravestone Restoration .....	416.53
1805 Schoolhouse Fund .....	577.00
Deaccession Fund .....	899.75
Water Tower .....	19,073.50
<b>TOTAL CASH ON HAND .....</b>	<b>30,070.76</b>



# ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEMBERS 2017

**President: Eva Clough (2017-2020)**

**Vice President: Thad Wolosinski (2018-2021)**

**Secretary: Jan Kilmer (2017-2020)**

**Treasurer: Ann Gray (2017-2020)**

**Jerry Fox (2017-2020)**

**Dylan Giambastista (2017-2020)**

**Denise Groll (2018-2021)**

**Tim Jerman (2017-2020)**

**Alan Luzzatto (2016-2019)**

**Justin St. James (2018-2021)**

essexcommunityhistoricalsociety@myfairpoint.net

Please take a look at your address label. The expiration date of your membership is noted. You can use the form below to update your membership.



## Essex Community Historical Society

P.O. Box 8388 Essex, Vermont 05451

### Membership Form

**Please consider becoming a member or renewing your membership at this time.  
Or you can pass this on to someone who would like to become a member.**

**Your dues will help us add to our collection of Essex memorabilia, maintain the museum,  
publish the ECHO, and sponsor historical programs.**

\_\_\_\_\_ New member

\_\_\_\_\_ Renewal of membership

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

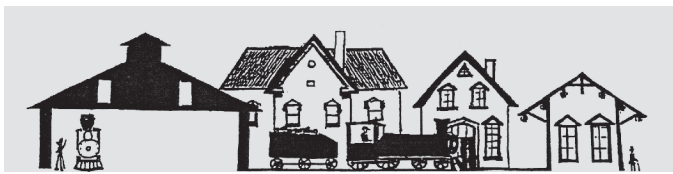
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

___ Individual membership	\$10.00
___ Family membership	\$15.00
___ Senior membership (60 and over)	\$5.00
___ Lifetime: individual, married, civil union	\$100.00

**Make checks payable to the Essex Community Historical Society.  
Thank You.**







ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O.BOX 8388

ESSEX, VERMONT 05451



ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Presents

## **The Annual Christmas Tree Lighting and Sing-a-Long**

**Friday, December 7th at Essex Elementary School**

**6:15 pm**

**Join us for the tree lighting, sing-a-long, and cookies afterwards!**

