

# ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE • SPRING 2019

We certainly had some snow here in Vermont this last winter. I am now anxious to have all of this snow gone and see those spring flowers popping up out of the ground along with the green grass.

The museum opens from 1-4 on June 2. Please come and join us.

We had our annual Christmas Tree lighting in December. There was another big turnout down on the common for the sing-a-long. Essex Police were present to help us cross the roads, Founder's Memorial Chorus directed by Megan Beaucage lead us in the singing. Everyone was invited back to the Elementary School to enjoy cookies made by the Essex Girl Scout Troops and hot cider and punch provided by the Essex Community Historical Society.

We are looking for new board members. Our board is decreasing and it is hard to find new people who are interested in learning more about our community and would like to help preserve our history and memorabilia.

Please email me at [essexcommunityhistorical-society@myfairpoint.net](mailto:essexcommunityhistorical-society@myfairpoint.net) if you are interested

Our Tales & Treasures of Essex public program series is starting again with our first program in May. See our program list in the ECHO.

We are looking for volunteers to help keep our museum open this summer. If you would like to help, please contact any of our board members.

We would like to thank our members for their continued support of the Harriet Farnsworth Powell Historical Museum. We also want to thank the Town residents, staff, and the select board for their support. We hope that many of you will take the time to visit the museum next to the Essex Free Library during visiting hours the third Thursday of each month from 7-8 and Sunday's from 1-4 opening again on June 2, 2019.

*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)

# The Essex-Williston Bridges at Hubbells Falls

TIM JERMAN AND JERRY FOX

Many older Essex residents who cross from Essex Junction into Williston every day remember the iron bridge that stood across the Winooski river from 1927 to 1984. The iron bridge had opened only months before the great flood of 1927 but almost didn't last a year! Damaged on both sides by torrents of water during the flood, the bridge held and went on to serve until becoming structurally inadequate to carry the increasing traffic. That sturdy structure provided great service for nearly 60 years until the current bridge was built right next to it.

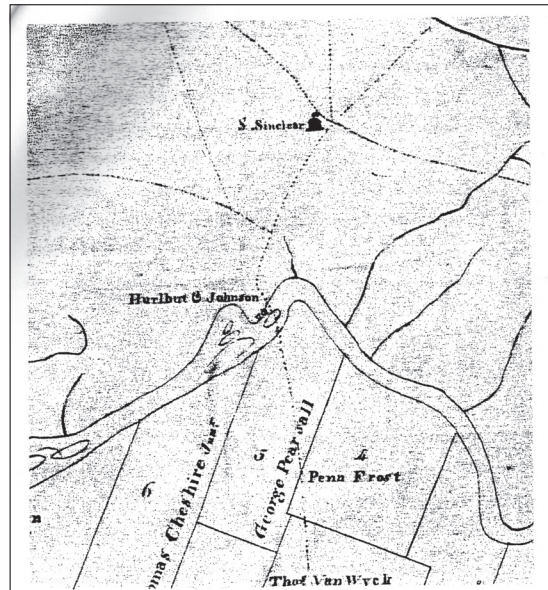


Figure 1. Location of Hurlbut's floating bridge at the Hubbell's Falls of the Winooski River. The house labeled "S. Sinclair" was on the current (2005) site of Lincoln Hall at the Five Corners in Essex Junction. Part of John Johnson, "A Correct Map of Burlington, 1810," Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.

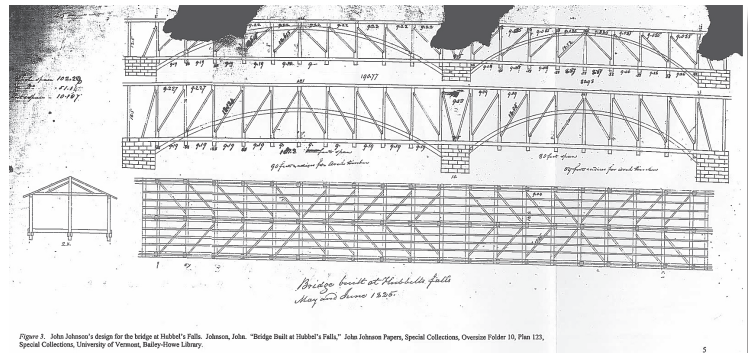


Figure 2. John Johnson's design for the bridge at Hubbell's Falls. Johnson, John. "Bridge built at Hubbell's Falls," John Johnson Papers, Special Collections, Overseas Folder 10, Plan 123, Special Collections, University of Vermont, Bailey-Howe Library.

But what about bridges before 1927? There is an interesting story, even a controversial one, about crossing the river in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Early in the history of both Essex and Williston, the importance of what was then Hubbell's Falls was understood as a power source for mills and business. As early as 1772 Ira Allen had surveyed the river and later established Abram Stevens as his man in charge of building a dam and sawmill operation near the falls. Abram is credited with building the first dam in 1798(1). An entire book could be written about the dams (at least 5) and the many businesses that flourished on both sides of the river, but here we will stick to efforts to cross the Winooski River.

The first bridge at Hubbells Falls was a floating

bridge built by one Daniel Hurlbut (or Hurlburt). He later moved to Burlington and is remembered for building several of the city's public structures as well as docks and wharves on Lake Champlain; he was clearly a gifted builder(2). While we don't know the exact location, a visual inspection from the bridge today still reveals part of "Rock Island" below the GMP Dam where the bridge may have crossed using the rock as a center support. The floating bridge is depicted as two lines on an early 1810 map drawn by master surveyor John Johnson (1771-1842); it is housed in the extensive Johnson portfolio in special Collections at UVM(3). The floating bridge lasted until circa 1824, when John Johnson, Joshua Haynes,





and Albert Stevens petitioned the legislature for permission to build a new bridge, which would be privately financed and charge tolls. In November 1824, after a multi-year process, the legislature passed Act 57 chartering the Essex Bridge Company to build a bridge to be erected “between the stone grist mill and clothier’s works at said falls”. Johnson owned the grist mill, Haynes owned the carding/clothier mill.

From the outset, private or public ownership was an issue. Essex voted as early as 1822 *not* to spend money on a “free bridge”(4). The Town of Williston also voted *no*. Long story short, the Bridge Company hired Johnson who designed a unique modification of the established two-span Burr Arch-truss bridge. Johnson was an engineering genius. He was Vermont’s third Surveyor-General and designed many structures including UVM’s classic Old Mill building, in 1801, and again in 1824 after a fire. He served Essex in the legislature in 1804. His first wife Rachel is buried in the village cemetery; she died in a dysentery epidemic in 1806(5). A Google search of John Johnson’s life is a compelling read. <http://scfind.inguids.uvm.edu/repositories/2/resources/1249> The private toll bridge was completed on time and became operational in 1825. A toll-house was erected on the Williston side of the river.

Alas, in 1830 disaster struck. As in 1927, the so-called “Freshet of 1830”, a great flood, wiped out the Johnson bridge and most of the businesses along the river. Here is where the historical record gets sketchy. In preparation for the Essex Bicentennial celebration, Frank Bent wrote the “History of Essex,” the blue book which has become a standard reference work on the town’s past. Unfortunately, Bent had a deadline and got some facts wrong. He reports “after the freshet of 1830, a covered bridge was built and remained in use till replaced by the present iron bridge in the spring of 1927”(6). Many researchers, these writers included, assumed that the well-photographed covered bridge which lasted until 1927 *was* the Johnson bridge, built in 1830. Definitely not the case; the Johnson bridge was destroyed after only 5 years in operation, and the next covered bridge was not built shortly after the flood..in fact it was not built until almost 1850!(7) Perhaps it should have been more obvious. The Johnson design had a center support, the later covered bridge clearly did not.

The intervening years were not happy ones for travelers between Essex and Williston. Beginning in 1830, town records show efforts to rebuild a bridge, but taxpayers were in no mood to spend money on

Court. The charter also included the allowable tolls for the next 25 years:

1¢ each	A person on foot
4¢ each	A horse and rider
2¢ each	Driven neat cattle, horses, jacks and mules in groups up to ten <sup>1</sup>
1¢ each	Each additional neat cattle, horse, jack or mule over the initial ten
½¢ each	Sheep and swine
6¢ each	Sled or sleigh drawn by one horse
2¢ each	Each additional horse
8¢ each	Cart of wagon drawn by one horse or ox
2¢ each	Each additional horse or ox
12½¢ each	Two wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by one horse
3¢ each	Each additional horse
25¢ each	Four wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by two horses
3¢ each	Each additional horse.

1. Vermont, Chapter 84, “An act granting to Daniel Hurlburt, the exclusive privilege to build a toll bridge across Onion River.” *Acts and Resolves* (1806) 116-119; Frank Bent, *The History of the Town of Essex Vermont*, (Essex Junction: Town of Essex, 1963), hereafter cited as Bent, 47. The Onion River is now known as the Winooski River.

2. The name “Hubbell” had several spellings during Vermont’s early years. The text of the 1806 act used the now outdated spelling “Hubbell.” This paper uses the current State approved spelling, “Hubbel”.

3. Neat cattle are of the Bovine family: oxen, cows and steers.

**1 Small Boat and 8 bushels of wheat,  
seized at South Hero, April 10, 1834.  
Given under my hand at Burlington,  
this 12th, day of June, A. D. 1834.  
H. LOWRY, Marshal.**

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**Wool Carding  
AND  
CLOTH DRESSING.**

**NOTICE** is hereby given that the **MACHINES** at Hubbels Falls, are in complete operation, and doing work in the neatest and best manner. The **FERRY BOAT** is in operation and is perfectly safe being drawn by a **Rope**. Customers coming to my shop will be ferried across free.

**JOSHUA HAYNS.**  
Essex, June 10. 1834. SW24

what might be another short-lived enterprise (especially after the private Essex Bridge Company collapsed after the 1830 freshet wiped out it’s only asset). In the meantime, a rope-towed ferry was set up to get folks across the river. Joshua Haynes, with a lot to lose because his wool-carding and cloth processing business required access to the Essex side of the river, advertised in the Burlington Northern Sentinel in 1834 “the ferry boat is in operation and is perfectly safe being drawn by a rope. Customers coming to my shop will be ferried across free”(8).

In 1838 (after 8 years without a bridge!) Essex voted at a special town meeting to appoint a committee to study the issue. However, in 1839, they defeated a motion to build a bridge at a different site, so clearly there was a debate about it’s location(9)! Finally, they did appropriate money for a new bridge which was built in 1840(10). The ferry must have run for at least ten years. Unfortunately, this new bridge effort did not go well at all. We can infer it was of poor quality; in 1841 the town voted to “take measures the strengthen the bridge at Hubbell’s Falls”.

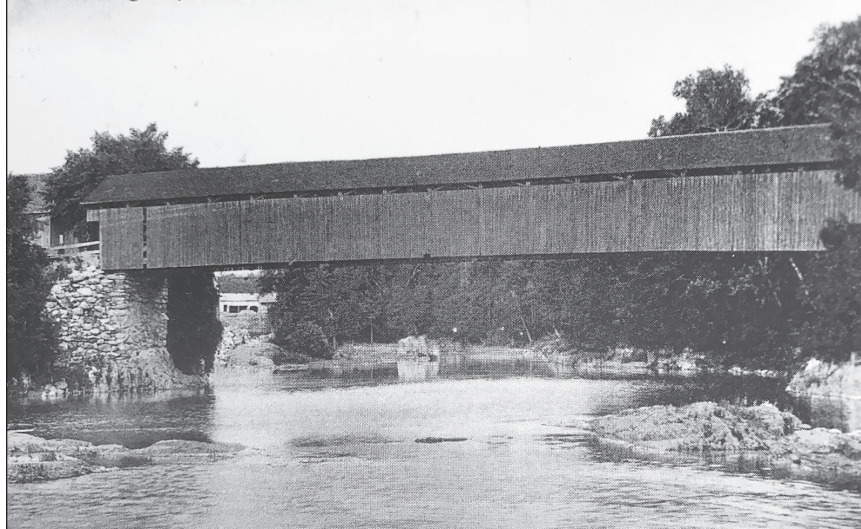
Another committee was appointed. At a special meeting the same year (one we'd love to have preserved on channel 17!) the committee reported "...we are of the opinion that the bridge is unsafe and ought to be condemned and your committee further reports that the bridge may be supported by means of braces from the rocks to the center of the long reach and by having two posts with a cap and braces to prevent swaying." The voters then voted *no* to raise funds for repair, then *yes*! They rescinded the no vote and left it for the selectmen to spend a \$.03 assessment based on the previous year's Grand List(11).

This went on for years, all recorded in the minutes of annual town meetings, available for public view at 81 Main Street. They read like a broken record. Finally, in 1847 something dramatic happened; we don't know exactly what. We do know that at the March 29, 1848 meeting the Selectboard reported paying Benjamin Tripp "for damages received by fall of Bridge at Hubbells Falls, \$12.27"(12).

Also in 1848, the Vermont Central Railroad construction crews were busily working their way through the Green Mountains toward Essex. Anticipating that the railroad's arrival would increase traffic across the river, the Town's good citizens approved a whopping assessment of \$.26 cents and another bridge was erected in a slightly different location (which had been approved in 1847)(13). Ironically, the 1849 town meeting minutes said only "bridge committee report called for, read, and accepted(14)". Clearly, after almost 20 years of annual conflict, the bridge was finally done and the less said the better! On the other hand, in Williston, where the bridge served what was at the time an isolated corner, town records provide extensive detail(15).

The new covered bridge of 1848 was worth waiting for and lasted a very long time-- 79 years. Several of the best photos of it were taken by Essex Jct. photographer W.C. Sawyer circa 1900. His river photos clearly show the extent of business on the river, including Samuel Brownell's sawmill, the bobbin factory, and William B. Johnson creamery(16). These businesses all left when construction began on the existing hydro dam was built by GMP by 1913.

*Covered Highway Bridge, Essex Junction, Vt.*



Perhaps the next time you cross the river from Essex or Williston, think of the efforts made and structures built over the past 200 years to keep our two communities connected!

***(Note: for anyone interested, research notes with additional details are available by contacting ECHS through our website)***

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. The History of Essex, Frank Bent, 1963, Essex Publishing Company, pg.47
2. History of Chittenden County, Vermont, 1886, D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, NY, pg.400
3. Vermont Acts and Resolves, Chapter 84 (1806, pg.116-119). Johnson's map is housed in the extensive Johnson portfolio in Special collections at UVM.
4. Essex Town Meeting annual minutes, Book 1, pg.206 (publicly available at Essex town clerk's office, 81 Main St., Essex Junction, Vt)
5. James M. Cutler, The Village Cemetery (printed record), 1976, grave 111.
6. Bent (see 1), pg.49
7. Essex Town Meeting annual minutes, Book 2, pg.152
8. Northern Sentinel (Burlington Vermont newspaper), 6/13/1834, pg.3 ad
9. Essex Town Meeting annual minutes, Book 2, pg. 53
10. "", Book 2, pg.65-66
11. "", Book 2, pg.79-80
12. "", Book 2, pg.85
13. Robert C. Jones, The Central Vermont Railway, Vol.1, pg.17; Essex Town Meeting annual minutes, Book 2, pg.174
14. Essex Town Meeting annual minutes, Book 2, pg.174
15. Williston Town Meeting annual minutes, Volume 1, pg. 313-314 for potential bridge sites, lengths, cost estimates of the bridge
16. Vermont Historical Society, photo gallery, WC Sawyer glass plate collection(available on VHS website)



# WILLIAM PARKINSON RECIPIENT OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION RECOGNITION AWARD

By KAREN BRIGHAM, GREEN MOUNTAIN DAR CHAPTER, HISTORIC PRESERVATION CHAIR

The Green Mountain Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) was pleased to award William Parkinson their 2018 Historic Preservation Recognition Award. This award must be approved by the National Historic Preservation Vice Chair and is designed to recognize worthy local individuals for outstanding achievement in all areas of historic preservation. The recipients are expected to have contributed to their community in an outstanding volunteer manner. The Green Mountain Chapter is especially proud of this award since it epitomizes one of their founding principles, which is to promote historic preservation.

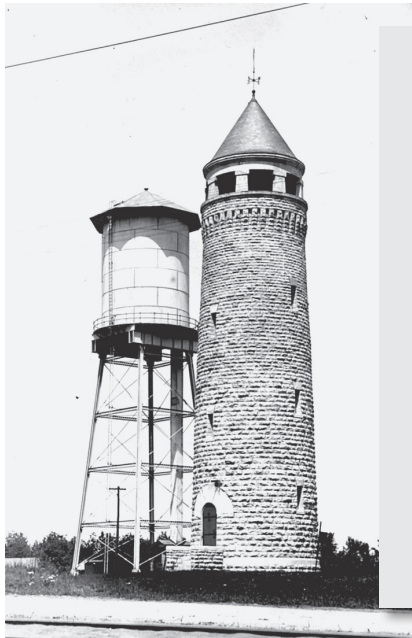
Mr. Parkinson was recognized for his outstanding work and commitment to the Fort Ethan Allen Museum (which included purchase, renovation, ongoing public openings and ephemera) and for the preservation of valuable historic material pertaining to all aspects of history at the Fort. He was also recognized for creating a self-guided walking/driving tour of the Fort and the book that accompanies that tour.

Mr. Parkinson received his award at the first NS-

DAR Green Mountain Chapter meeting of 2019, held on April 6<sup>th</sup> at the Vermont National Country Club.



Historic Preservation Award presented to William Parkinson, by Karen Brigham, Historic Preservation Chair, Green Mountain DAR Chapter. Photo Courtesy of Betty Andrews.



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

Jerry Fox

Town of Essex Voters

Ellen and Thad Wolosinski

**\*\*Donations received  
November 1, 2018  
to April 1, 2019**

## TOWER UPDATE

The budget approved at this years Town Meeting included an additional \$10,000 in the Capital Fund account allocated for repair of the Water Tower, bringing the Town's contribution to \$54,168. That, together with the approximately \$20,000 we have raised, is enough to repair the tower roof from the outside using a crane. Dennis Lutz's Public Works guys are working on a request for quotations which should be ready some time in June. Hopefully in the Fall we will see some activity around the tower.



# TALES & TREASURES OF ESSEX HISTORY

## 2019 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

### WEDNESDAY, MAY 29

**Brennan Gauthier will present a program about WW I with an emphasis on some of the soldiers from Essex.** Brennan has accumulated a collection of photos and stories which describe the impact of the Great War on Vermont.  
Essex Memorial Hall, 7 p.m.

### SUNDAY, JUNE 2

**The Harriet Farnsworth Powell Historical Museum. 1-4 p.m. opens for the season.**

Join our Open House with activities. This years' emphasis will be on "Individuals that helped to shape Essex". The museum is located at the intersection of Routes 15 & 128

### WEDNESDAY, JULY 10

**Edward Phelps & the "Lay of the Lost Traveler" Memorial Hall. 7 p.m.**

A humorous review of a famous but virtually unknown Vermonter who caused an ongoing stir in Essex Junction with a sarcastic poem penned after missing the train to Boston in 1881. Tim Jerman leads the discussion.

### WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14

**"The War Before The War: Radical Abolition In Antebellum America"**

Jane Williamson speaks to the wave of antislavery that swept the country in the 1830's as some churches demanded the immediate emancipation of the slaves.  
First Congregational Church - 7 p.m.

### WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

**Will Parkinson leads a virtual reality tour of Fort Ethan Allen at his Military museum**

The fort was originally established as a U.S. Cavalry post in 1894. The museum is located at 11 Darcey Drive in the Fort, Essex - 7 p.m.

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1

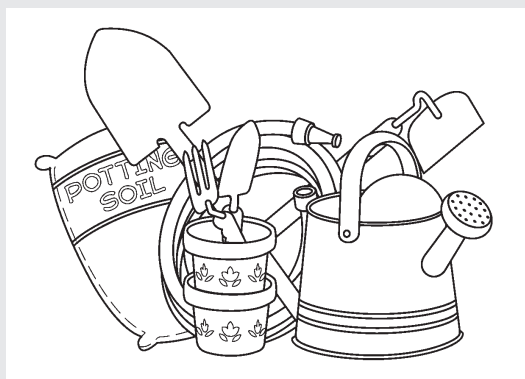
**E.C.H.S. Annual Meeting**

After a brief business meeting participants will be treated to a small dining buffet of items created from historical Essex recipes. First Congregational Church - 7p. m.

### FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6

**Essex Community Tree Lighting & Sing-Along**

Join us for the holiday tree lighting on the Town Green on Route 15, 6:15 p.m. and afterwards for refreshments at the Essex Elementary School.



## GREEN THUMBS NEEDED!

Please volunteer this year to help Alan with the gardens around the museum. Just a few meetings during the season are all that are needed. Call Alan to volunteer. 802-503-2637.

## THANK YOU!

The Essex Community Historical Society was selected by Shaw's store leadership as the benefiting non-profit in the GIVE BACK WHERE IT COUNTS Reusable Bag Program for May.

The program is simple: We will receive a \$1 donation every time a \$2.50 reusable GIVE BACK WHERE IT COUNTS Bag is sold during the month of May at the Shaw's store located at: 71 Boxwood Street, Williston VT.



# ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2019

**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 Giambatista (2017-2020)**

**Denise Groll (2018-2021)**

**Tim Jerman (2017-2020)**

**Alan Luzzatto (2016-2019)**

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

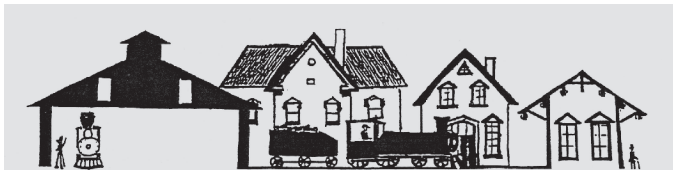
\_\_\_ Senior membership (60 and over) \$5.00

\_\_\_ 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

## WHAT IS MY STORY?

I turned up at the museum  
last summer.

Without a note to say  
anything about me.

The Society would like to know who loved  
me, where I came from,  
and when.

If you donated me or know  
something about me,  
please contact the historical society.

Thank you,  
The Lonely Elephant

