

ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE • SPRING 2021

To some here in Vermont this may have felt like the longest winter! To me winter came late and left early. My son at one point said as he had to repeatedly plow my driveway, "this is the storm that keeps on giving". We ended up in northern Vermont having an early spring.

The Essex Community Historical Society Board at this point is meeting every other month. We still answer emails and reply to people but since we have not been able to meet in person for quite a while, we decided to take a short break. We have high hopes that most of us (one of our board members lives in Georgia and another one lives in California) will be able to meet in person soon. We are also anxious to open the museum so we are looking at opening the doors the beginning of July, 2021. The Harriet Farnsworth Historical Museum is in a building that is owned by the Town of Essex. We have had several roof leaks over the years and the town has tried to fix the leaks. We had work done on the roof a couple of years ago and ended up again with a water leak. The town's new facilities manager took a look at what was happening and determined that there was no flashing around the chimney so he had that repaired and the ceiling and walls by the sink in the first bathroom repaired. We are so happy that this has finally

been fixed. Debbie Doe has graciously volunteered to work on our flower gardens. She has already transformed them by taking out the dead leaves and stocks and putting down new mulch which she asked Lamell Lumber here in town to donate and they said yes. Now we need to wait to see what plants come up before we add any more.

Charter member, Mary Lois Gonyea Tewarson has passed away. She was a very social, generous, and dedicated member in her community. In Essex Junction, Vermont she held senior positions of the Lion's Club, was an avid member of the Essex Memorial Day Parade Board, Essex Green Up Day coordinator, and an active member of the American Legion. (Obituary in the Burlington Free Press)

We would like to thank our members and the Town of Essex for their continued support and Lamell Lumber of Essex, Vermont for donating the mulch for our flower gardens and Art Kilmer for painting the repaired ceiling and walls in the bathroom at the museum.

Stay safe and stay healthy!

Eva C Clough, President



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

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SWORD STORIES

BY TIM JERMAN

This is the first of two Essex history vignettes which are unrelated except they both revolve around battle swords and demonstrate early Essex ties to turbulent historical events.

The first is about an event which took place in 1825. It comes down to us from two trusted sources (at least one an eyewitness account), reporting independently. The first source is Essex town historian Dr. Lucius Castle Butler. Writing years later in the 1870s, he described an emotional reunion between Essex Revolutionary War veteran David Day and his former commander, the esteemed Marquis de Lafayette. Lafayette's triumphal 1825 U.S. tour of the country was a huge event in Vermont, with stops in Burlington and other towns. Butler describes the encounter:

"On the farm now occupied by Horatio and Charles Day {upper Main Street where the Lang Farm and Sweet Alchemy are now}, David Day settled and built the house now occupied by them. "Uncle David", as he was familiarly called, was a soldier of the Revolution, a sergeant under Lafayette in the company armed, equipped and commanded by him. He was ardently attached to both Washington and Lafayette, and his eye would Bash, and his resentment quickly show itself when any imputation was cast upon the honesty, integrity or patriotism of either. The sword he carried, and which is still kept as an invaluable relic in the family, was presented to him by the latter. When Lafayette visited Burlington, in 1824 [wrong date, it was 1825], "Uncle David", taking the sword which had done good service in the cause of his country, went to see his old commander. At first Lafayette did not recognize him, but when he held up before him the sword, now like himself almost gone, as he said (the hilt and a portion of the blade remaining only), Lafayette at once recognized the old hero, and both wept like children. The thoughts crowding that moment let no pen write. In the Eternal House their pure spirits have long since met in joyful recognition." (1)

Butler was three years old when Lafayette visited. Pure speculation, but he could have attended with his parents and likely gotten the details later from his father Billie Butler, war veteran grandfather Stephen Butler, or others of the many town residents who would have attended the ceremony. Another local historian, William Wallace Ingraham, wrote in his "History of the Castle Family", in 1903:

"The story of General Lafayette: In the summer of 1824 [also wrong, possibly copied from Butler], General Lafayette returned to America on a visit and requested the sons of the revolutionary war to meet him in Burlington, Vt. This request was respectfully answered by the sons of Vermont. From the hills and the

valleys of Lake Champlain they came, and Abel Castle [early settler] was present, with Chester Ingraham [Baptist minister in Essex] and his grandson, William W. Ingraham.

This day is one of my early remembrances. My father objected to my going to see General Lafayette. "Oh, papa, I want to go with you and Grampa to see Lafayette". Then mother and Grandmother Castle interceded for me and grandpa said, "Chester, let William go; he will never forget General Lafayette." Said papa, "He is not dressed to go". "I will have him dressed in a jiffy; let Willie go," said mother. We soon left for Burlington, passing Essex Center [the Castle house still stands on the Weed Road], Butler's Corners, Col. David Day's house, who was in the war with General Lafayette, and arrived at Essex Junction. On leaving this place we entered the great dark pine forests of Essex and Colchester [try to image Route 15 an unbroken pine forest!]. On our arrival at Winooski Falls, how charmed I was with the water splashing and tumbling over the rocks into the salmon fishing pool.

As father was driving over the road at Winooski, grandpa said, "That is the old Ethan Allen house, and there is where the old log fort was built, and there is where the rope ferryboat crossed the river to Burlington. On going up Catlin Hill {now Colchester Avenue}, he pointed out the Indian fields where he wintered his cattle and where he lived near the bank of the river below the falls. On arriving at the head of Pearl Street I got a view of Lake Champlain. "Oh, grandpa, what is it that shines so? It shines just like glass!" Papa drove down Pearl Street and we soon arrived at Burlington Square. Here stands the noted giant lone pine tree, near the north end of Burlington square. Under this tree was erected the platform upon which to welcome General Lafayette on his return to Burlington, where he could receive the sons of the revolutionary war.

"Oh, grandpa, who are all these dressed up with their bright guns, marching around after that drummer pounding on each end as though he were determined to break his drum?" The great cannon went off, making all the women jump and scream as though they were hurt. On came the troopers at a keen jump and with drawn swords, looking as though they wanted to kill us.

Their coats were red, their pants white, their bearskin caps tipped with red from which waved a white plume. I just put my arm around grandpa's leg and took hold of his knee buckle and held fast. Papa then took me up on his arm so I could see the men on the platform; these were the officers of the state, with other great men, who came to see General Lafayette. Very soon the men with their fife and drums, and the dressed-up men with shining guns, the red coats on their horses, came marching from the hotel with the Governor [Cornelius

Van Ness] and General Lafayette, with others, to the platform around the great pine tree.

When General Lafayette and the governor were seated, the people were called to order, and the governor delivered his speech of welcome to General Lafayette. The Revolutionary soldiers were introduced by the Governor and then seated upon the platform. Those from Essex were Samuel Bradley, Gideon Curtis, Stephen Butler, Abel Castle, and Col. David Day. Colonel Day was a tall, spare man, with long white hair combed back and lying on his coat collar. He was feeble in health and wore a long camel's hair continental coat, with cape reaching just below the elbows. His coat was buttoned from the collar to the knee and the cape buttoned full length. Colonel Day walked slowly to General Lafayette with the Governor, who said, "I have the honor to present to you Colonel David Day, of Essex, Vt." The hand of each was presented at once and a hearty welcome was exchanged. Colonel Day moved to the right of Lafayette and began to unbutton the cape of his coat, then unbuttoned his coat, placed his hand on his sword, drew it from the scabbard and presented it to General Lafayette. The sword was recognized at once. "My God, David, is this you?" At once they embraced each other and wept. Said Lafayette, "David, I didn't remember you; but that sword I gave to you on that eventful day I remember well." Nearly all those on the platform wept as these two men who had fought side by side the battles of the Revolution said farewell to each other.

General Lafayette was a slender man of medium height, with a wide, high forehead, and a small Roman nose." (2)

A contemporary of LC Butler, Ingraham was born in April 1818 and would have been seven when he saw Lafayette. It seems likely that his recollections would also have been reinforced by family recollections after the fact. It would be a wonderful find today to locate the sword which Butler recorded was still in the possession of the Day family. If anyone knows of living descendants, please let us know at ECHS and we will try to find this wonderful relic!

Later that day, the official party was feted at a grand reception at Grassemount, the governor's house on Main Street (so named by his wife), which had been built in 1804 by Essex's Abram Stevens.

As the last surviving French general of our revolution (1775-1783), Lafayette's tour took up much of two years.

(3) He entered Vermont from Cornish, New Hampshire, on June 28, 1825. He took a stagecoach to Barnard and Royalton and passed through Randolph, where he met young future U.S. Senator Justin Morrill. With escort from Governor Van Ness, he passed through Barre to large festivities in Montpelier that included a speech by Vermont Supreme Court Justice Elijah Paine (the father of rail pioneer and governor Charles Paine, who gave Essex Junction its early moniker of Painesville when his rail line reached Essex in the late 1840s).

On June 29, Lafayette reached Burlington at around 11:00a.m. In addition to the ceremony described by Ingraham, he laid the cornerstone for the "south college" building at UVM (Old Mill reconstruction, still there) and gave a talk to about 50-60 students. After the Grassemount gala, he departed via steamboat to Whitehall, New York later in the evening. President John Quincy Adams had an American warship, the Brandywine, carry Lafayette back to Europe on September 7. The general was 68 years old. One last Vermont footnote occurred at the very end of the journey. General Isaac Fletcher, ready to depart the Brandywine, relayed greetings from Revolutionary war compatriot General William Barton, and explained that Barton had been confined in debtor's prison in Danville, Vermont for fourteen years! Lafayette then paid Barton's fine which allowed him to return to his family in Rhode Island. Barton, Vermont, is named for the stubborn general rescued by Lafayette so many years after the revolution. Another version of the story has Lafayette visiting Barton in Vermont, but that seems unlikely as Danville wasn't on Lafayette's itinerary.

Next up in sword stories: a military sword from the mid 1600's was found sticking out of the ground in Williston on the banks of the Winooski River in 1872. Why was it there? How did it get there? Where is it now? (Hint: we know where this one is!) Stay tuned....

--Tim Jerman, Essex Community Historical Society, Chittenden County Historical Society

REFERENCES:

1. Vermont History Magazine, Abby Hemenway multi-volume history of Vermont towns, Volume 1, page 780
2. History of the Castle Family: From 1635 To 1900 (1903). William Wallace Ingraham; EJ Decker Co., Chicago, Ill. Pp. 97-99
3. Wikipedia: Visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to the United States



AFTER SCHOOL DELIGHTS

By LAURIE JORDAN

“Have you ever heard of a Soda Jerk?” I hadn’t, until I asked an older native resident what she used to do in the Essex Junction village after school hours. I was about ten years younger and I grew up outside of the Junction. Janet reminisced how she would go down the hill from the Prospect Street Essex Junction High School to Railroad Avenue, where there were at least three drug stores—all with soda fountains. “We would ask for a Soda Jerk that would come out of the soda machine with a jerk of the handle into what would become a root beer float.”

“Ya,” agreed Ray Yandow when I interviewed him about being one of three barber shops on Railroad Avenue back then. Like Janet, he remembered how

“There used to be a soda fountain there [across from the station]. I used to go there after school in 1957 coming down off the hill. We’d stop at Bob’s Dairy Bar and you know, you’d get a soda and you’d hang out. And they had music, ... little juke boxes on the wall at each booth.”

Now it was time for me to ask friends in my High School Class of ’69 what they did in the village after school. A classmate explained how he dropped by where his mother worked at the Essex Junction Maple Syrup Co-op near the tracks after school to get some maple leaf candy scraps. “Oh, we went to Al’s,” others answered. Although I lived in the Center, I often drove by the popular french fry mini restaurant on Main Street just before the railroad tracks. By 1969, the soda fountains were gone from those three drug stores still near that corner. Bob’s Dairy Bar was no longer there, but Al’s French Frys was the place to be.

I wanted to know more and was told that Al’s French Frys, now in South Burlington, really started in Colchester. “No,” I explained. “I have researched how the owners, Al and Genevieve Rusterholz, lived right in the white house next to it in the Junction.” They started it in the late 1940s. “My classmates went there and I always remember it being there.” So I asked still another village classmate, “Was this true?”

Rick clarified, “It started out as a French Fry cart down on Norse’s Beach on Mallett’s Bay.” The photo showed a 1947 license plate on their trailer. He continued, “Then later they moved to where Sadie’s is now in

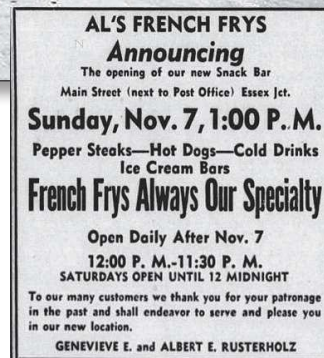
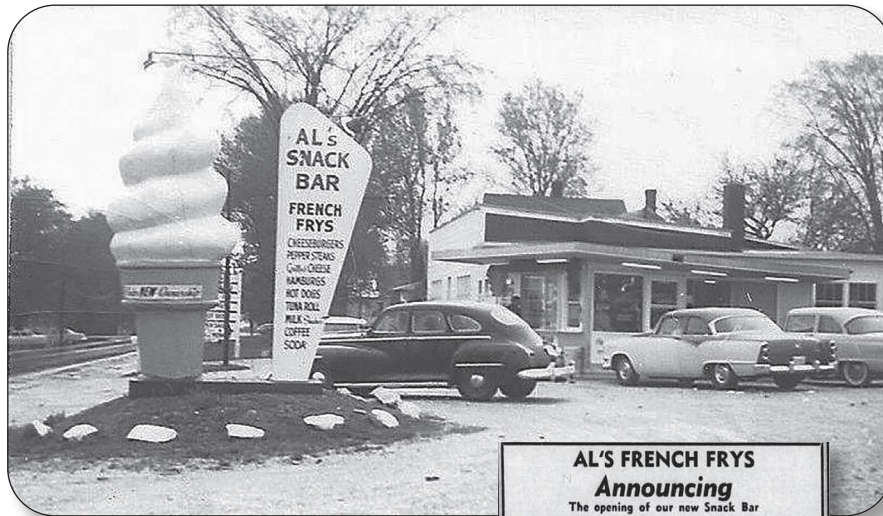
Mallett’s Bay. After that, they set up in the Junction, next to where they lived.” Dee Dee told me that her father used to work for them. They had a stand on Pearl Street, between the Fairgrounds and Suzie Wilson Road, in front of where the motorcycle place was. I remember when Pearl Street had the A & W drive-in that was just before the shopping centers. Now there is a brand new restaurant at

Al’s Main Street site. The drive-in delights took over the soda fountains.

However, instead of going to Al’s, I took a bus home to the Center after my high school day. Essex village and town have changed over the past forty years, but out in the Center Powell’s Place is still standing. Powell’s Place was remodeled from the small

drive up Vincent’s Snack Bar stand to a popular mini eat-in restaurant next to the Four Corners on Center Road.

Unfortunately, the lady that bought the name and place from Martin Powell died in a car accident a



few years ago and it remains empty.

Mr. Powell had been the town representative, town moderator, Essex Central School principal, and my neighbor growing up. He purchased the snack bar from Vincent’s and renamed it. I remember biking up there for a quart of french fries for supper. The summer I turned 15, I rode my bike to the small Powell’s Place for my first summer job.

I spent my sophomore year summer making everything from french fries to cree-meets. Yes, I had to peel the potatoes and push hard to press them through an old cast iron fries cutting machine on the back kitchen wall. My favorite lunch was the expensive pepper steak. I have tried but cannot replicate that delight. I usually chose a coffee flavored milk shake and finished off with a hot fudge sundae with nuts. I would eat lunch or supper out back on the small grassy area between the stand and the cemetery fence. Rill and Martin Powell worked along with me, and their son Bret remembers how late they came home during

fair week.

You see, Powell's Place had their own Pig 'n the Blanket stand at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds. Meanwhile, I stayed at the Essex snack bar and mastered those "pigs". I don't think Mr. Powell ever revealed his secret corn dog batter recipe, even though I asked him for it. I never mixed it. I just stuck the dog on the stick, twisted it in the batter and carefully lowered it into the deep fryer's hot grease. Then after about a minute, I turned it. I hadn't heard of corn dogs until later. Just Pig 'n the Blankets.

Customers could choose a salad, fries, and from a large variety of sandwiches. I had a chance to prepare anything on the menu. I could name off flavors of banana splits, milkshakes, sundaes, sodas and floats, and cree-mee choices and sizes. The baby cree-mee was just five cents. I would press the lever to fill up the cone then make a small swirl on top. The 5" tall creemee was twenty five cents and sometimes toppled over on me. I knew how to fill

the flavor and ingredients into the cree-mee maker soon enough for it to harden before the other one ran out. But the most enjoyable experience was meeting the people.

The High School principal and other important people came to the window. Yes, I got to make the tallest cree-meets for four high school soccer players but the first one tumbled on me. So I made another one. I don't remember any workers other than the owners and family, who were very helpful and friendly. After all, they were my close neighbors. I did the dishes and usual cleaning, but they cleaned the messy grill and deep fryer. It was a greasy hot place to be in the summer. But I had the soda and cree-meets. The Junction had Al's French Frys. Jericho had Joe's Snack Bar. And the Center had Powell's Place. Little did I know that I would continue my social connections with more Essex and Village residents by catching inklings of historical facts and folklore not only after school, but into my senior years.

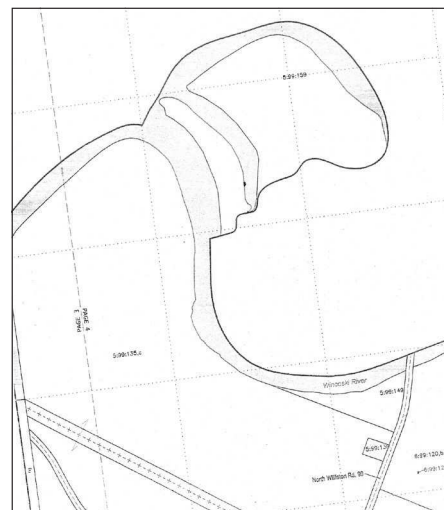
CORRECTION

PART TWO of an article THE GREAT FRESHET OF 1830 was published in the Fall 2020 edition of the ECHS ECHO. The article generally described the impact of the 1830 freshet on Vermont and Essex with particular emphasis on the influence the flood waters had on Alder Brook and the Winooski River. The primary research centered around the area know as Fay Island, a partial of land just westerly of the North Williston Road in Essex, currently partially surrounded by water. In summary, the article described how the freshet of 1830 straightened the course of the Winooski River in this area and consequently isolated the portion of land that came to be known as Fay Island, where as the river prior to 1830 had looped around Fay Island. Examination of property records and maps in Essex and Williston showed conclusively that Fay Island is a part of Williston even though most contemporary maps show the boundary between Essex and Williston to be the centerline of the present Winooski River.

The maps shown in the Fall 2020 edition of the ECHS ECHO to illustrate the town line controversy were incorrectly presented with the Essex tax map shown twice. Reproduced here is the correct display of maps showing the town line between Essex and Williston as it is *incorrectly drawn (dotted line) on the Essex tax map and correctly drawn (solid line) on the Williston tax map.*



Essex tax map 2019. Fay Island upper left shown in Essex. Town line shown in middle of current Winooski River channel.



Williston tax map 2019. Williston Town line loops around Fay Island following the center of the old river channel.

The entire article, parts one and two, with the maps correctly shown, can be seen on the ECHS web site at <https://essexcommunityhistoricalsociety.org/>.



NEW ECHS ACQUISITION!

TIM JERMAN

We are excited to add a local treasure to our museum collection. This is a one-rider winter horse training sleigh used at the Whitcomb farm, Essex Junction, in the early 20th century to train horses for both winter racing and muddy summer conditions. This sleigh would have been used to train Dariel, a prize racer who at one time was considered one of the fastest horses in the U.S. Summer and winter racing were huge pastimes in an era when many farms were eager to have their horses compete for bragging rights and often a small purse for winning. Edward Whitcomb is credited as the driving force behind the family's love of racing.

The Whitcomb farm is still operating, and Onan Whitcomb, Edward's great-grandson remembers going to Saratoga, NY, as a child with his family to race; they also raced at Vermont county fairs. Onan recalls that "Morton W", a stallion he describes as a "mudder" was their star racing horse in the 1950's-60's, because he excelled in less-than-optimum track conditions.

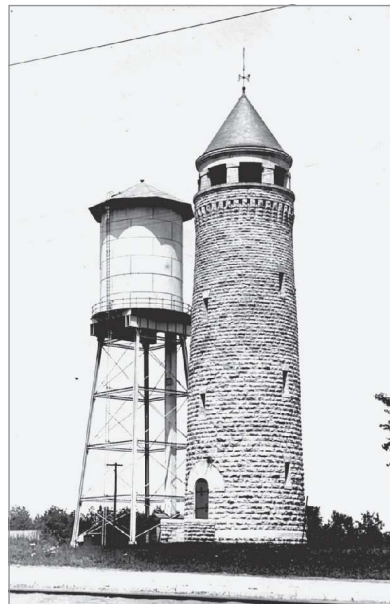
We will have lots more information with the display when we are able to re-open the museum next to the Essex Free Library. The sleigh was made in Homer, New York, which was part of a major carriage-works that flourished in Cortland, NY before the age of automobiles. We hope that local residents will be able to see it and imagine our community in a simpler time when farming was still what many people did for a living.



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

Art and Jan Kilmer
Will Parkinson
Don and Faye Soderberg
Town of Essex

**Donations received
October 1, 2020 to March 15, 2021



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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

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Name(s) _____

Mailing Address _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____ Email _____

___ 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

Museum Opening?

Please visit our website

www.essexcommunityhistoricalsociety.org

or email us at

echsvt@gmail.com

for any updates on our programs
and museum opening.

We anticipate opening July 11th.

Thank you for your continued
support of ECHS.

We look forward to being together
again sometime soon.

