

ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE • FALL 2022

We had our 31st annual meeting on October 4, 2022, at the First Congregational Church in the new City of Essex Junction, Vermont. We have had a busy and very hot summer and it now looks like a cold fall. The museum saw a total of about eighty visitors during the summer.

We co-sponsored a program with the Essex Junction Cemetery Association, and one with the Blue Spruce Grange. We put on a total of six Tales and Treasures programs this summer and fall. We were just invited to do a program for Mansfield Place here in Essex, VT, which will be the end of October.

Since our last annual meeting we have had seven tours with the first-grade students from the Essex Elementary School and a tour for the Senior citizens and a private tour for four. These tours were fun to be able to help students learn about the history of Essex. The Senior citizens were excited to see our artifacts and learn more of our history.

We also just participated in Explore Essex program put on by the Essex Parks and Recreation Department. We had the museum open October 1st. and 2nd. We had a total of thirty-one visitors.

Our 2023 calendars are printed and ready for sale. Many thanks to Art and Jan Kilmer for all their hard work compiling and putting it together.

Our museum is looking great; Sandy

Packard and Hubie Norton have worked very hard hanging big items on the walls to make more space to walk around and more handicap accessible. Sandy also made shelves to go on the windowsills and that made a big difference in making it possible to move many of our items off the floor and free up walking space and easier to get around our displays. What a difference all of this work has made to what our museum looks like. Many thanks to them.

A huge thank you to June Packard for taking care of our gardens this year. She did such a good job getting the weeds under control. Our gardens were beautiful all summer.

The decision to start the repairs on the Fort Ethan Allen Water Tower was moved to Spring of 2023. We are applying for matching grants, and we needed to have enough money in our account and the Town's account to match these grants. We are very excited to see work begin on the tower.

Tim Jerman, Dylan Giambatista, Thad Wolosinski and Denise Groll are leaving the Board. Thank you for all your help.

Our board member and Treasurer, Ann Gray received an award for doing such a great job for the last three years as Vice chair of a national committee for the Daughters of the American Revolution. Congratulations Ann!

Eva C Clough, President



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

P.O.Box 8388
Essex, Vermont 05451
ECHSVT@gmail.com

AN IRISH ENCLAVE IN ESSEX— THE STORY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT 16 IN THE 1840's

BY TIM JERMAN

Public education has always been important in Essex. Essex Community Historical Society member and historian Hubie Norton recently completed a comprehensive history and evolution of public school education in Essex, Vermont from 1763 to 1867. It will quickly become a go-to reference for a host of research into our town's early years.

This paper takes a closer look at a micro-level of Hubie Norton's research—the families of what became school district #16 in 1846, 1848, and 1849. I became interested in this district as a result of extensive solo hiking at the Essex Indian Brook Reservoir during the early days of the Covid-19 epidemic in April 2020. I was intrigued by the knowledge that the creation of the reservoir in the 1950's and the subsequent park trails of the 1970's had both submerged and preserved some of the history of our town. Old house foundations are now under water; parts of two connecting roads are submerged, but several old cellar holes, foundations, and wells are intact in the park. Curiosity about who had lived there, when and why, led me to begin researching the area's history. I knew that there had been a school near or in what is now the reservoir. When I asked Hubie Norton about it, he supplied me with a detailed list of the families in the area who attended school there on Indian Brook Road, long before the reservoir was created in the 1950s.

First, I learned that the school is not underwater. It was known as the "Day School", after Jonathan Day who lived nearby. The school operated from 1846-78, first as district 16, then folded into district 14. The 1878 school supervisor report to the town notes: "The schoolhouse having been destroyed by fire, district 14 has held two terms of school in adjoining districts this year". The Town record noted "They have no schoolhouse or shed; both having been burned up. The expense of building a new one will vary from two to four hundred dollars, according to size and finish...the entire Grand List is less than \$100 dollars." Rebuilding never happened. The 1879 report declared that district #14 had ceased to exist...the location of the schoolhouse is now farm fields, with two collapsed, overgrown frame structures and an abandoned well."

When I started looking into the families who lived and were educated there, I made some startling discoveries. For those readers of Irish descent, I learned that Essex had a very substantial Irish enclave beginning slowly in the early 1820's and expanding steadily with pre-famine Irish who settled primarily in the Indian Brook, Lost Nation*, and McGee Road areas of Essex. I had never seen any historical reference to this in traditional local history sources. That could be because the town's major

historian, Dr. L.C. Butler (1820-1882) was out of state much of the time until 1850; therefore, the Irish may have been established and accepted in the community and did not seem worthy of mention as a group. The Irish settlement here also came in a couple of waves, to be discussed later. I also learned that everyone discussed here has a great personal story...one in particular a very odd Civil War story from the battle of Gettysburg. Although the Essex Irish did not match



the numbers in Burlington (31%), Underhill (21%), or Fairfield (22%), the total percentage of those born in Ireland on the 1860 census was a surprising 8.1%, or 167 of 2052 residents. Another 11 were Scottish, likely Ulster Scots who also emigrated from Ireland. The Essex figure does not include children born in the U.S., which would nearly double the total and come much closer to the above town's totals. Vince Feeney's "Finningans, Slaters, and Stonepeppers—A History of the Irish in Vermont" contains a wealth of information on early Irish immigration.

If you've walked the trails and old roads near the reservoir, you know the stark beauty of the steep rock formations and forest surrounding the water. This did not represent beauty to early settlers. This was hardscrabble land, available to poor farmers who would have to clear the forest of rocks and trees to create pasture for their sheep and cows. The low rock walls which are everywhere on the trails were not really walls as much as rock dumps...backbreaking labor to move and stack so as to create fields for pasture and tillage. But in pre-industrial Vermont, this was a chosen life for Yankee farmers who could own land cheaply, and for immigrants who could never dream of owning property in their home country.

Much of the unsettled land in the northwest part of town was originally owned by Burlington speculators Thaddeus Tuttle and Moses Catlin. Ira Allen's personal secretary John Knickerbator owned a large parcel at what is now land close to the reservoir (all on 1807 John Johnson survey map of Essex).

By the 1840's, statewide standards were emerging for teacher preparation and textbooks. "An act relating to common schools" was passed in 1845. These efforts were led by Governors William Slade and Horace Eaton, who later became the first state Superintendent of Education. But Vermont's population growth was slowing, to a 4% growth rate. 42% of all native-born Vermonters lived out of state. After the 1850 census was complete, historians report "many reasons to be anxious remained: the nagging fact of the state's falling population growth rate, its basically flat economy, the dissipation of revivalist passions, a rising uneasiness concerning "foreign immigrants", and an enlarging sense that an era of social and political ferment had passed". Vermont's booming sheep economy was on the wane, but the railroads were coming to change the landscape. Irish immigrant crews began construction of the Paine line from Northfield to Essex in 1845. "Freedom and Unity—A History of Vermont", by Sherman, Sessions, and Potash, has a good description of change in the 1840s and 50s.

School districts ebbed and flowed in the early years as the population grew in Essex. District #16 was created in 1844 but didn't begin operation until 1846. There were 17 districts at the zenith, but consolidation began in the 1850's as the population of the town actually declined until 1880. For a detailed description of the school district 16 families please visit our webpage.

These families lived and attended school in one of the most remote and rugged sections of town—the northwest. The land they farmed was usually known as hardscrabble; filled with schist rock formations and forest, most of which had to be cleared by painstaking manual labor. The low rock walls in the area on the Indian Brook trails are a silent testament to the hard life which would have been a daily struggle for survival in the 1840's. On a nice day, it's not hard to imagine the children walking to school... the Scullins from the north on Indian Brook Road, the McKeermans and Tubbs from the west on McGee Road, and the Days, Crosbys, and Dixons from the south on Indian Brook Road. Sadly, records were not kept on the names of teachers so we don't know who chose to teach at the Day school.

This school research has revealed surprising numbers. Of the 32 children in school 16 in 1846, fully 17 were born to Irish-American parents with at least one born in Ireland. Of 26 in 1848, 16 of 26 were Irish. In 1849, again 17 of 32 were Irish. Where did they come from and how and when did they get here to Essex? The 1850 census offers many clues. There are a large number of "Canada-East" birthplaces along with "Ireland" on the census. Some of those are married to or living with Irish immigrants,

suggesting that the main wave of Irish immigration trickled down from Canada and not up from New York or Boston. In those years, a census taker went door-to-door to count residents, and the dwellings were numbered by the order the houses were visited. That allows us today to follow along on the 1857 Walling map (which listed the family name of each house) to see where the families actually lived (those still there 7 years after the 1850 census, which did not contain addresses). The results are eye-opening.. there were over 30 distinct first-generation pre-famine Irish families living in northwest Essex, located mostly on the Lost Nation and Indian Brook Roads and nearby connectors. These families are listed in appendix B in order of visitation by the census taker, with positive location identification if they also appear on the Walling Map or the later Beers Map of 1869. Some had children in a different school district, some did not.

Conclusion:

Visitors to the Indian Brook Reservoir Park may be surprised to learn of the impressive early history of this town jewel and its surrounding roads. The preserved land, rock walls, old roads, cellar holes, and dug wells are a visual reminder of the sacrifices early settlers had to make to raise food and livestock in a harsh environment. Some of the children identified above went on to lead long and prosperous lives. Some fell in the terrible war to preserve the union. Many left Vermont for the promise of a better life in the west. But they all started here, in a one-room schoolhouse, in a town which really did value education from a very early date. The author hopes that visitors will take the time to walk up the old Indian Brook Road past the scout area on the north side of the reservoir and linger at the remains of the Scullin house. Think of the youngest child Myron Patrick Scullin, age five, coping with the death of his father and now having to help his mother survive and raise six children miles from "civilization". Now I invite you to contrast the peaceful country scene in front of you to young Myron's ordeal just 13 years later on Cemetery Ridge in Pennsylvania, as this Essex Irish-American farm boy became part of one of the most pivotal battles in US history.... "Myron's full and amazing story will be published in the Spring 2023 ECHO.

For a listing of the people who made this area their home you can visit the Harriet Farnsworth Powell Historical Museum, or you can go to our website at essexcommunityhistoricalsociety.org and click on the history tab.

**There are hearsay accounts of how the Lost Nation Road got its name; possibly after a child who was briefly lost in the area and then found, according to Frank Bent's History of Essex. Is it more likely that due to its settlers Ireland is the "Lost Nation" which so many had to flee due to poverty and oppression? No evidence just educated guessing..(and the subject of a VPR podcast, September 4, 2020).*

NEW DENTIST IN TOWN

By RICHARD ALLEN



Dr. Daniel W. Smead sits on his front steps at 66 Main Street in Essex Junction. The sign says Smead's Dental, Rooms. The photograph is from the Wilbur C. Sawyer collection at the Vermont Historical Society, courtesy of Tim Jerman of the Essex Community Historical Society.

If you were a Chittenden County resident and in need of dental work in 1871, you would welcome the announcement that Dr. Daniel W. Smead would soon open an office in Williston. A veteran of the Civil War, Smead came from Malone, New York and offered “all kinds of dental work in a thorough and satisfactory manner and at most reasonable rates....All work warranted, and satisfaction guaranteed.”


Smead was a traveling dentist, his route included Chittenden County and Addison County in such towns as Bristol, Milton, Hinesburgh, and Richmond. Residents were encouraged to inquire at the village hotel to learn of his local schedule. Those seeking assurance of his skills in “mechanical and surgical dentistry” could contact “his many acquaintances of Malone of his reputation and success there.” In addition, “nitrous oxide or laughing gas” was offered “for the painless extraction of teeth to those who desire it.”

Part of Smead’s training was under the guidance of Dr. Sheldon in Malone and at the Harvard Dental School where he attended lectures.

So how far advanced was dentistry at this time? In 1871 the first foot powered mechanized dental drill was patented by James Beal Morrison. The slow-moving drill would require a patient to sit still for perhaps a couple of hours under the care of the dentist. He also invented an adjustable dental chair that allowed the patient to take a number of comfortable positions. Morrison was an Ohio native and internationally trained in Paris and London.

In early 1874, it was announced that Smead would soon return to Malone. But the decision was rescinded due to the “large number of warm friends” he had in this vicinity. Perhaps seeking a more lucrative practice and tired of traveling, in 1878, Dr. Smead set up an office near the railroad depot in Essex Junction. He was an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic both in Vermont and nationally. By 1891, his professional success was noted with ownership of “one of the finest residences” in town where he rented out rooms. The house is still standing at 66 Main Street. He practiced dentistry there until about four years before his death in 1919.

DENTISTRY.



D. W. SMEAD, DENTIST,
WILLISTON, VT.

Will operate for the year 1873, as follows :
The first Monday of each month for one week at
Milton.
Monday and Tuesday of the remainder of each
month at Richmond.
Wednesday and Thursday at Hinesburgh.
Friday and Saturday at Williston.
Please make early engagements,
All Work Warranted, and satisfaction guaranteed.

DENTISTRY.

D. W. Smead, dentist, Williston, Vt., will operate for the year 1874 as for past three years, visiting Bristol, Milton, Richmond, and other places in Chittenden and Addison Counties, at stated times, notice of which will be given by card, each time. If you do not secure a card, can find when He is to visit your place, by making inquiries at the village hotel. Being prepared to do all branches of dentistry in a thorough manner, he guarantees satisfaction to all.

Dentist Dr. Daniel W. Smead used these advertisements in the Burlington Free Press to announce his traveling schedule and services.

JERRY FOX WAS PRESENTED WITH THE 2022 GREEN MOUNTAIN CHAPTER DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Jerry Fox was presented with the 2022 Green Mountain Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution Community Service Award by Ann Gray, Green Mountain Chapter Community Service Award Chair at the Chapter meeting on October 1. The award is given to individuals or groups making a contribution to the community in an outstanding manner through voluntary heroic, civic, benevolent service, or by organizing or participating in community activities. Jerry received the award for the voluntary work he does for ECHS specifically inventorying and photographing the museum's collection, accessioning the back log of museum artifacts into the data base, supervising student interns at the museum and researching Essex history. It was noted in his nomination that Jerry spends an average of 4-6 hours a week with the ECHS collection. In addition to receiving the award, Jerry was the featured speaker at the Chapter meeting. He presented his research on an African American living in Essex in the 1830's.



2022 Water Tower Restoration Happenings

Approval of \$45,000 in Town Capital budget by Selectboard and Voters

Request submitted for \$150,000 in Congressional Directed Spending to Senator Sanders. He recommended inclusion in the FY23 Federal budget. Congressional subcommittee at the next level of review rejected Senator Sanders' recommendation.

Decision made to postpone repairs to roof and windows planned for Fall of 2022 so applications could be submitted for matching grants. These grants require proof matching funds are available and the funds would not be available if spent on repairs.

- Applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from the Walter Cerf Community Fund.

- Application submitted for a Vermont Historic Preservation matching grant of \$20,000. Funding to be awarded in December 2022.
- Application in process for National Society Daughters of American Revolution matching grant of \$10,000. Deadline for submittal December 31, 2022.
- Received \$1,000 in donations from individuals.

Thank you to the following who have made donations since the Spring ECHO

General Fund

Polly McEwing

Ft Ethan Allen Water Tower

Walter Cerf Community Fund

Jerry Fox

Hubie and Sherry Norton

Will Parkinson

A MUSEUM TREASURE ON THE SMITHSONIAN SCALE

JERRY FOX AND HUBIE NORTON

Last year the family of Arthur (Joe) and Emily Packard gave the Museum a prize artifact, a settlement era wooden plow. It was once used on the Castle family farm which was astride Weed Road east of Brown's River Road (Vermont Route 128).

A portion of the Packard Farm was initially settled by Able Castle who moved there from Jericho in 1790. Able was a master carpenter, having learned his trade from Ethan and Ira Allen's cousin Remember Baker. Able is known to have built plows and may have built this one.

Our plow is of a style known as a Connecticut Plow or a Carey Plow. These may be two names for the same thing or perhaps not. We are not yet sure. The



wooden frame is clearly handmade from a soft wood and the joints are morticed and pinned. The two handles are canted and are not the same, suggesting that they were made at different times and perhaps not in a factory. The only metal parts are the plowshare hammer welded to a bolt with a washer and a key wedge to hold the share to the frame. They appear to be hand forged. The plow

is very similar to one at Old Sturbridge Village and is dated by them to have been built between 1790-1800. We are still researching this item, hopefully more about this later.

The plow is now mounted on the Back Room wall above Harriet's Green Jelly cabinet. Come and see it this summer.



ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

October 2021-September 2022

REVENUE

Dues	680.00
Book sales	200.00
Contributions	864.10
Town of Essex FY22 Budget	4,000.00
Tales and Treasures	0.00
Interest income	10.64
Deaccession	0.00
Water Tower**	11,942.34
Other -- mugs/t-shirts	25.00
Total Revenue	17,722.08

EXPENSE

Calendar (checking)	0.00
Echo Newsletter	578.50
Postage/PO Box	646.55
Historical Society Dues (VHS & Williston)	100.00
Web page	0.00
Sing-a-long	0.00
Office supplies***	883.54
Collection	278.75
Exhibits	0.00
Insurance	688.00
Tales and Treasures	462.39
Printing	0.00
Calendar	883.19
Books	0.00
Comcast	839.00
PastPerfect software	0.00
Preservation Collection	657.00
Donation	100.00
Secretary of State filing	20.00
Folding chairs	100.00
Total Expenses	62,36.92

ACCOUNT BALANCES 9/30/22

General Accounts	
Checking	3,548.10
Savings	1,257.64
Restricted Accounts	
Collection insurance (checking)	750.00
Echo (checking)	450.00
Postage (checking)	0.00
Comcast (checking)	690.00
Tales and Treasures (checking)	838.62
Archival/preservation expense (checking)	780.00
CD -- TD Bank (separate)	4,810.53
1805 Schoolhouse Fund (savings)	577.00
Water Tower (separate)	32,680.52
Total Cash on Hand	46,382.41

**Includes \$1,237.80 calendar profit

***Includes items used to store and protect archives



ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O.Box 8388

Essex, Vermont 05451

We are excited to offer our 2023 calendar. The topic is “Iconic Businesses of Essex”. It features twelve businesses from the early days of Essex and Essex Junction with a brief historical description.

Calendars are \$15.00 each and if needed shipping is \$3.50 per calendar. Checks made payable to The Essex Community Historical Society and mailed to P.O. Box 8388 Essex VT. 05451.

All proceeds from the calendar sales will go to the restoration of The Fort Ethan Allen water tower.

The calendar will make a great Christmas gift.

We will be at the Harriet Farnsworth Powell Historical Museum on Saturday, November 5th if you would like to stop by and purchase a calendar.



If you are interested in purchasing a calendar email us at echsvt@gmail.com

ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2022

President: Eva Clough (2023-2025)

Vice President:

Secretary: Jan Kilmer (2023-2025)

Treasurer: Ann Gray (2022-2024)

Shawn Bartlett (2022-2024)

Jerry Fox (2022-2024)

Scott Taylor (2023-2025)

Chuck Willard (2021-2023)

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 _____ Email _____

MEMBERSHIP:

___ Individual membership \$10

___ Family membership \$15

___ Senior membership (60 and over) \$5

___ Lifetime: individual, married, civil union \$100

DONATIONS:

___ Water Tower Fund \$ _____

___ Preservation Fund \$ _____

(for preserving our Archives)

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

