



The ECHO October 2002

A Message from the President...

Let me introduce myself. I am Clinton Russell, have lived in Essex for the past 36 years, and am a retired nurse and hospital chaplain. Barbara Mudgett, a long time resident of the village and I married nearly two years ago. I am accepting this position because Ron Clapp is stepping down as president after many years, but is remaining on the board. We all thank him for his endless enthusiasm and energy toward the work of the society.

As with any organization's incoming president, I have some trepidation. Will I be able to perform the tasks given to me? However, having come to know the members of our board it is a pleasure to be working with them in this capacity.

Kay Helfrich, one of our valued board members, is cataloging our collection into the computer. This is time consuming and is performed item by item. It is hoped she will continue even though her time on the board has ended. Also, our hearty thanks to those other members leaving the board after giving many hours to the work of the society. This includes Diane DiGennaro and Ann Yandow.

The Century Home project will be starting soon. Simply stated, this will recognize homes and other buildings over a hundred years old. An explanation of the project will be in the next ECHO.

We may be calling on members of the society other than the Board of Directors to lend a hand with the projects we have envisioned. I say this because another project we would like to get underway this coming year is The School House,

which was moved to the Commons last year. We would like to replicate a school of the period (1805-1830). Also ongoing is the yearly History Expo at the Tunbridge fairgrounds each June. We have had two find displays the last two years. It has not been determined whether we will exhibit this coming year. If you have an idea what we could display, give one of the directors a call.

What I see as the operating plan for our board is by the committee method. The by-laws state that is the approach to use, and perhaps this is the time to step back to the way of working. I don't see myself as a manager, rather as a "player-coach". An exciting year is coming upon us and together we will be able to continue our forward movement.

Clinton Russell
President of the Essex Community Historical Society.

The Park Street School, School District No. 1

By Mary O'Neil

The Superintendent's Report of 1873 gives the following advice:

At the Junction, there should be erected immediately a new building of sufficient size to accommodate all the children of school age, or of sufficient capacity to accommodate the Higher and Intermediate departments, the old house repaired, and perhaps a new one erected in some other portion of the village, all of them supplied with modern furniture, the two last named for the Primary school.¹

The schoolhouse for School District No. 1, sometimes known as the Anna Early house or the Discovery Museum, had overextended its capacity some years before. (The school enrollment for 1860 lists 86 scholars at the Anna Early house;² in 1873 the enrollment jumps to 139.³) As the Town had welcomed the Chittenden Classical Institute in 1855 for higher learning (built with private donations), the village was compelled to construct a larger, more spacious building to provide the three levels of instruction that it had offered at its smaller schoolhouse further down Park Street.

Town of Essex Land Records reveal that millwright Almon D. Rood and his wife Abigail deeded the land to the Graded School District May 29th, 1873 for a cost of \$800.00.⁴ As was the popular custom, Mr. Rood was transferring land adjacent to his own homestead on Park Street. The Rood home still stands, but is nearly obscured as it is encapsulated within the commercial strip that houses the Domino's Pizza and Bouyea-Fassetts Bakery Thrift store.

Doctor, and historian L.C. Butler offers this viewpoint:

In 1872, Essex Junction Graded School, so called, was chartered by the Legislature, and in the year following the present commodious and well-arranged school building was erected upon the large and ample grounds, which surround it. It was built at a cost of nearly eight thousand dollars, by a tax upon the grand list of the district. It has three grades - primary, intermediate, and grammar - and is well sustained. Thus the scanty means of education enjoyed by the girls and boys of 1796 have been multiplied and improved as the progress of civilization and population demanded. With all its schools and privileges, Essex ought to be in advance of its neighbors.⁵



The Park Street School was built for \$8,000 in 1873. It was never just a high school, but always a mix of graded and secondary classes.

Essex Junction had newfound prosperity, with the arrival of the railroad in 1849. This beautiful, Italianate brick school was a reflection of that prosperity. Along with that success came the reputation of having the most prosperous and engaging schoolhouse in the district:

The schools in District No. 1 are, in many aspects, the banner schools of the town... These schools have attained their present position by the dint of earnest, persevering, self-sacrificing, unrequited (peculiarly) labor on the part of the prudential committees who have had them in charge, and the aid of the superior teachers that have been uniformly employed... The people of the district are justly proud of their schools, and are to be commended for the zeal and interest they manifest in the important work of free education, for all the children within their limits. I would commend their example to the other districts in town as one eminent worth to be followed. There is no reason why just as good schools, with just as good teachers, and just as thoroughly progressive, may not be enjoyed by the children of every other district in town.⁶

An interesting note made by the Superintendent in 1873 reflects the two sides of the new economic boom brought to the village with the railroad. Although the new schoolhouse is evidence of this prosperity, there is also an emerging problem of school absence. There is an extraordinary anomaly in the student attendance number for the village, as pupils from age 12 to 19 have a greater percentage of school absence compared to other schools within the town. The Superintendent remarks:

It is safe to assert that (some) will not attend school. Some of them are married. Some are brakemen and firemen on the railroad trains. Others are engaged in various pursuits. A large percentage of the entire number have no adequate idea of the value of education, and are wanting in parents who ever attempt to assist their feeble inclinations to attend school by wholesome parental authority.⁷

The Park Street School still stands on the original site, having remained within the ownership of the school district until the present. Its use, however, has been modified as four more elementary schools have been constructed in the interim.⁸ Most recently, the building has housed on the upper floor the ACE program, a specialized alternative educational opportunity for students who have not found success in traditional school settings. The main floor had been home to a preschool for many years. Until this past year, it sheltered the Early Essential Education program; another resource for early diagnostic effort and response to developmental challenges in pre-school children.



The Prospect Street School, built for \$40,000 in 1912, served as high school until 1956. Named the Fleming School in 1973 after Thomas Fleming, a custodian at the school from 1944 to 1967.

The interior of the school remains amazingly intact. Wood wainscot surrounds the entrance vestibule and ascends up the stairs. Asbestos abatement has already been achieved. Although the twin chimneys have disappeared as well as the belfry, the original form of the schoolhouse remains strong, easily discernable, and historically intact. A few of the windows on the east façade and the back have been bricked up.

Dave Willey, an Essex High School student and athlete 1944-1948 remembers the upstairs basketball court. It was the practice of the team to allocate part of their pre-season in the task of repainting the walls and floor, as a method of holding down the ever-present dust. The walls were essentially the court sidelines: If the ball hit the outside wall, it was considered out-of-bounds. The athletes also had to play around a coal stove, taking care to prevent incurring a nasty burn. Backboards were nailed directly from the ceilings, so any shot trajectory had to be relatively flat to be successful. One end featured primitive bleacher constructed of rough-sawn lumber. It was only considered part of the home court identity.⁹ Supervising Principal DeForest Bartoo had remarked in 1926:

The basketball Gymnasium in the primary building is a success. Several visiting teams have expressed their delight and approval of same. We hope more people will learn where this gymnasium is located and patronize it better next year.¹⁰

The Park Street School was added to the register of Vermont State Historic Sites in April of 1980, and is recognized by the state as a significant historic resource. Although neighboring communities built similar style schoolhouses in the ensuing years (Jericho Corners School, now the Town Offices, the Jericho Center School, now owned by the Congregational Church, the Riverton School or the New Haven Mills School, now both private residences), none equals the grandeur of the high style brick Italianate school on Park Street. It is also the only school of that era that remains in use for which it was intended.

Ironically, this building is endangered. Three years ago, the Prudential Committee (school board) voted to allow their board the power to sell this building upon the discretion of the board. A boiler failure during the winter

of 2000 triggered talk of the building's sale. The Park Street School's close proximity to village amenities and ample parking possibilities caught the attention of several business owners. Village residents flocked to the school board meetings, requesting that the school district not only make necessary repairs to the heating system, but to consider placing the district offices of the Superintendent at this site. What could be more appropriate, it was asked, than locating the central offices of local education in this building, which historically had served the needs of education for more than 123 years? Although the board ultimately decided to repair the boiler after property services staff was able to locate replacement parts, the future of the Park Street School remains in question.

Most recently, a plan outlined by the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Burlington Rail Project specifically included the Park Street School parcel. Their Draft Environmental Assessment details the "irretrievable commitment" of this resource for a 136-space commuter parking lot for the rail service. Final conclusions in the assessment detail the consideration by school officials to designate the school as surplus, "so the use of the parcel for additional parking will not displace any existing uses."¹¹

The school district does not appear to have a procedure for declaring school property "surplus" at this time, although the Village of Essex Junction Land Development Code only allows the conversion of public schools into elderly housing.¹²

After an objection was filed with the CCMPO, the Park Street School was removed from consideration as a parking lot as part of the rail service. Even if the building were to remain standing and the lawn paved up to the door, there would be a significant impact on the setting of the school. Built on a rise above the village green, it corresponds to the late 19th century formula for educational buildings to assume a "higher ground" both physically and in their commitment to address the moral and civic responsibility they accepted in educating the youth of the town. Superintendents strove also to construct schoolhouses that were architecturally worthy of standing alongside other significant public buildings. Even after this controversy, however, the Park Street School is still without a firm plan to guarantee its survival.

Essex has demonstrated a long and sincere commitment to education. The original land allotments made by the selectmen for schools, including the land on which both the Anna Early house and the Park Street School sit, describe the intended use for educational purposes for as long as wood shall continue to grow and water to run.¹³ Fundamentally, we must see ourselves as caretakers of those resources that have been left to our watch. The Park Street School is a tangible reminder of our enduring commitment to accept the challenge of educating the youth of Essex.

1. Annual Report of the Town Officers. (Burlington: Free Press Steam Book and Job Print, 1873), 13.
2. Town Record. 2:382.
3. Annual Report of the Town Officers. (Burlington: Free Press Steam Book and Job Print, 1873.), 11.
4. Town of Essex Land Records. 16:87.
5. L.C. Butler. Essex Centennial. The One Hundredth Anniversary of the Settlement of Essex, Vermont. (Montpelier: Argus and Patriot Book and Job Printing House, 1883), 22.
6. Annual Report of the Town Officers. (Burlington: Free Press Steam Book and Job Print, 1878), 20-22.
7. Ibid. (1873), 13.
8. It merits mention that currently there are five separate buildings with the village of Essex Junction that have served as High Schools: The Anna Early House, Park Street School, Prospect St. School (Thomas Fleming), Albert D. Lawton School, and the Essex Community Educational Center.
9. David Willey (Telephone interview, 12 January 2002).
10. DeForest Bartoo, Supervising Principal. Report included in the Fifty-Third Annual Report of the Essex Junction Graded School District. (Essex Junction: Essex Publishing Co., 1926), 8.
11. Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization. Burlington-Essex Rail Project; Draft Environmental Assessment. June, 2002. 4-3.
12. Village of Essex Junction Land Development Code. May 15, 2001. 118.
13. Essex Land Records. 2:130.

Editor's note: The reader is also directed to "Essex Junction High School in the 1930's," by Noah C. Thompson,

in the Spring 2000 issue of the ECHO for details on the high school on Prospect Street.

Mary O'Neil is a third year Historic Preservation graduate student at the University of Vermont. Her research has spurred invitations to speak at several local historical societies and to publish in the Newsletters for the National Council for Preservation Education, the University of Vermont Historic Preservation Journal, and the *History Forum*. Her scholarship, recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, re-identified the Chicken Bone Café as the circa 1815 "Captain White House" at 43 King Street in Burlington's historic waterfront district. Her particular fondness for 19th century schoolhouses resulted in three separate studies for the University of Vermont of surviving building examples. She is the 2002 recipient of the Weston A. Cate, Jr. Fellowship for the Vermont Historical Society. She lives in Essex Junction with her husband and seven children.

The Suburban List Notes High School Dedication, 1957

By Richard Allen

An October 10, 1957 issue of the *The Suburban List* (10 cents, \$4.00 a year) had a special section on the dedication of the new \$700,000 high school in Essex Junction. The new school had 17 classrooms. The layout of the building "separates classroom activities from those activities which are noisy and disconcerting to classroom study." In the activities wing were the gymnasium, cafeteria, kitchen, shop and music room. The gymnasium could seat 750 on folding bleachers. A folding wall allowed for two physical education classes at the same time.

The eight page section contained full details on the building and the special features that made it an up-to-date facility, as well as profiles of some of the important people behind the project.

A Community Meets Its Responsibilities

Once again the people of Essex Junction have reason to be proud of themselves. As Vermont's fastest growing community, this village has been faced again and again in the last few years with the problem of furnishing additional educational facilities for the ever-increasing number of children being raised here.

Again and again Essex Junction has met the challenge. In 1950 the new graded school on Summit Street was built to handle the increase in children reaching school age.

At the same time a new auditorium and gymnasium was added to the school on Prospect Street.

When the school population continued to grow, the old Park Street School was completely renovated in its interior to furnish further service in the teaching of graded school students. This was done in 1954.

Still they came. Indian Acres children began to reach school age in scores. And so, in 1955, the Hiawatha Avenue School was started. It was occupied for the first time a year ago (1956).

At the same time the Hiawatha Avenue School was approved by the voters of Essex Junction, the new High School on Maple Street was also OK'ed.

On Sunday this school will be dedicated and the people of Essex Junction will have the opportunity to see what they have bought. We feel sure they will approve.

The October 13 dedication ceremony included Albert D. Lawton, Superintendent of Schools from 1935 to 1957, and Hazen Wood, who became Superintendent of Schools on July 1st of 1957. The main address was given by Dr. A. John Holden, Jr., the State Commissioner of Education. Chester Taft, the high school principal, and Clifford McLure, Chairman of the Prudential Committee also participated.



A postcard post-marked July 1964 is captioned "New High School, Essex Junction, Vt." Part of the message reads, "I'll be going to this school next year. I hope I don't have this (sic) much trouble as you did finding your room."

New High School is Functional, Well-Equipped; No Country Club This

There has been much criticism in weeks gone by of an alleged "country-club" atmosphere in new Vermont schools. Critics, led by Barnard-based Dorothy Thompson, question whether or not we are giving our children too much luxury in their schools. Schools in Woodstock and Middlebury, in particular, have been criticized for this.

We have not seen the schools in Woodstock or Middlebury, but if the critics are basing their laments on schools like the new Essex Junction High School, we believe they are unfounded.

The new high school on Maple Street is a picture of beauty and design, and practical in layout, equipment and function.

The newspaper went on detailing the modern touches that made the new building so great, and at the same time down-playing those features that might be seen as extravagant.

Another Step-Saver The Inter-Com System

No longer is it necessary to send messengers from the administration office to the far corners of the building when the principal's office wants to speak to a teacher or students.

Now the principal's office simply calls the room they wish to get in touch with and the teacher in the room can answer via the inter-communications system without having to go all the way to the office...

Bright Colors Help Make Bright Students

Remember when school rooms were all black blackboards and dark brown paint? Brown walls, brown desks, brown window shades, and often brown spirited students, were common in school everywhere. It isn't hard to remember when the only pleasant place to look was out the window. And if you lived in a city, even that was likely to be a blank wall.

Bright, light colors don't cost any more than dark ones. Yellow paint is as cheap as brown. But what a difference it makes in appearance. Big windows and lots of daylight are actually an economy, in saving electricity and eyesight.

Today's school planners take account of the importance of cheery surroundings to a pleasant sense of well-being. The new high school is a fine example of the use of color to relax, cheer, and inspire.

Drab surroundings are said to make drab and un-eager students. If bright surrounding make alert students, Essex High will have as wide-awake classes as can be found anywhere.

The sound deadening properties of the acoustical ceilings, the hall lockers with ventilating louvers, and the upcoming landscaping were all noted for their innovation.

The newspaper section had congratulatory ads from local businesses: Teachout Brothers, who furnished the plumbing, heating, and ventilating, as well as the Hotpoint appliances in the Home Economics Department, and the Drury Brick Company, "Brick Makers since 1867," provided brick for facing for almost all of the outside of the building.

Site work was done by Cass-Warner Corporation and Steve's Home Supply furnished the kitchen range for the cafeteria.

The list of 20 staff for the high school included the principal and assistant principal. Many of these professionals had double teaching assignments, such as social studies and English, or English and librarian, or math and Girls' Physical Education.

When it opened, this building had an enrollment of 320 students, but a capacity for 400.

The 1957 Essex Junction High School is now the Albert D. Lawton Intermediate School on Maple Street. This building served as the high school in Essex Junction until the Community Educational Center opened in 1970.

Short Stuff

We are missing past issues of the CHO and would like to complete our collection. If anyone has the Fall 1991, Fall 1993, or Spring 1995 issues, please contact Eva Clough at 879-0849

Please check to make sure that your address is correct and the expiration date of your membership. Please use the membership form to update your address or membership.

The Fall tag sale was a success in several respects. We added to our treasury and got rid of many boxes of left over things that were clogging up the basement of the museum. Thank you to all members who helped and a special thanks to Scout leader Ralph Runne of Troop 676, and his son Adam, for their assistance.

Our annual meeting on October 1, 2002 featured Marcy Harding of Richmond illustrating some history of Chittenden County through picture postcards. What started our as a hobby has turned into a major collection for Ms. Harding. She did an excellent job and we enjoyed testing our knowledge of some of the older buildings in the area.

The historical Society opened the Water Tower at Fort Ethan Allen on Saturday, October 5, to the general public. The

weather was great, affording a view in all directions. One hundred and three people climbed the stairs and we appreciate the donations that were made to our general fund.

If you haven't visited the Essex Community Historical Society web site, you are in for a real treat. We now have about 50 articles about Essex history on line. They cover such topics as the Brownell Block, Essex in the Civil War, the Burlington and Lamoille Railroad, and many more. Many of them are illustrated. We invite you to explore this ever-increasing collections about Essex history. You can find us under Community Organizations on the Town of Essex, Vermont home page, www.essex.org.

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