

ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ESSEX TOWN-EST.1763 ESSEX JCT.-EST1892 ESSEX COMM. HISTORICAL SOCIETY-EST.1991

The Echo

The Newsletter of the Essex Community Historical Society

Spring 1999 VOL 13

May 1999

A Message from the President

I would like to share with you an event that is going to happen this summer. As a member, if you would like to participate in this event, we encourage you to, and would appreciate your assistance.

The Essex Classical Institute will be celebrating its 125th anniversary. The celebration will be a combined class reunion for attendees and graduates of the Essex Center High School. The Essex Classical Institute building was turned over to the Essex Town school district and became the Essex Center High School from the early 1900's until the 1950's.

We have already heard from 55 past graduates who plan on attending. The day, **Saturday, August 28, 1999**, will be filled with activities culminating in a catered supper in the evening. The Historical Society will have this wonderful opportunity to have all these people in one space. We plan on giving walking tours of the commons, bus tours of the community, copying or logging in memorabilia, and doing oral interviews with as many individuals as we can. The graduates who are attending really want to share their stories and connections with Essex's past. The day starts at 12:00 noon at the Essex Elementary School and extends into the evening.

If you would like to participate in this very unusual day, please contact me at 878-2584 (work), or 879-0619 (home). You can participate to whatever extent your time allows—one hour to several hours.

Respectfully yours,
George Clapp,
President

Essex Classical Institute: The School on the Hill

By George R. Clapp

The residents of Essex realized that to be successful in life and a good citizen, their children would need education beyond the elementary grades. In August of 1855 the Chittenden County Institute opened its doors to 125 students. It was located on the northeast corner of Browns River Road (Rt. 128) and Bixby Hill Road.

In 1862 the Institute changed its name to the Essex Academy. With the new name came the idea of boarding students. This was achieved by using the hotel on the Commons and later a boarding house (circa 1875) which stills stands on the west side of Bixby Hill Road across the Essex Elementary School.

At approximately 7:00 p.m. on February 14, 1868 the cry went out that the school was on fire. Over the next several months a group of people met at the dress shop to devise a plan on how the school was going to be rebuilt. Several residents donated money, while others donated time and skills (masons, carpenters, etc.)

In 1874 the school again changed its name to the Essex Classical Institute. The new ECI functioned with a fifteen-member board of trustees.

Around the early 1920's the ECI Academy was turned over to the town school system and became the Essex Center High School. The facility was a high school until 1950. At that time it became part of the K-8 elementary system.

In 1972 a consulting engineer firm reported that the building was in need of major repair and was unsafe. Although the building was being used by four classes from the Elementary School, when the ECI board of trustees received an estimate of \$75,000 to \$100,000 to make building upgrades they reluctantly agreed to have it torn down. The trustees, represented by Wright Bigelow, president, Marvin Weed, and Perry Towers, approached the town school district and offered to deed both the building and the land to the district if they would pay for the demolition. The town school board agreed.

Even with the demise of the building the board of trustees still exists. ECI is a non-profit organization with a financial portfolio. It owns approximately nine acres of land across from the Elementary School, south of Browns River Road. Since 1950 the board has awarded over \$100,000 in scholarships.

We look forward to celebrating our 125th anniversary in August.

Bixby Hill and the Thompson Farm

By Noah Thompson

Bixby Hill and Bixby Hill Road were named after the Bixby families that owned the hill top house and surrounding farm dating back to around 1850. Several abutting properties were added over the years thus enlarging the farm. Leonard Bixby was the last of the Bixby's to own the farm. He died in 1949 and in 1950 the farm was sold to us.

In Essex's early years Bixby Hill Road (officially named around 1970) continued on to connect with the Pettengill Road in Westford. But prior to the Civil War the northern section was abandoned at the former McAvoy farm. In 1950 only three houses existed beyond the Bixby/Thompson farmhouse.

The hill leading up from the Center was lined on both sides with elm trees that formed a canopy over the road. The story is told that many students attending Essex Classical Institute and living in the boarding house across the road spent much leisure time in the winters sliding down Bixby Hill. My mother, Elsie Leach, was one of them; she graduated from the Institute in 1899.

The House

It is believed that Colonel Stephen Noble built the main part of the farmhouse sometime between 1790 and 1805. Three sides of the house were built of brick on plastered lath with no insulation. Wide upright planks formed the north end of the original house. The kitchen was added later. The upstairs main bedroom had 22 inch wide floor boards. The house was well built. Stephen Noble died in 1808 and is buried in the Essex Center cemetery.

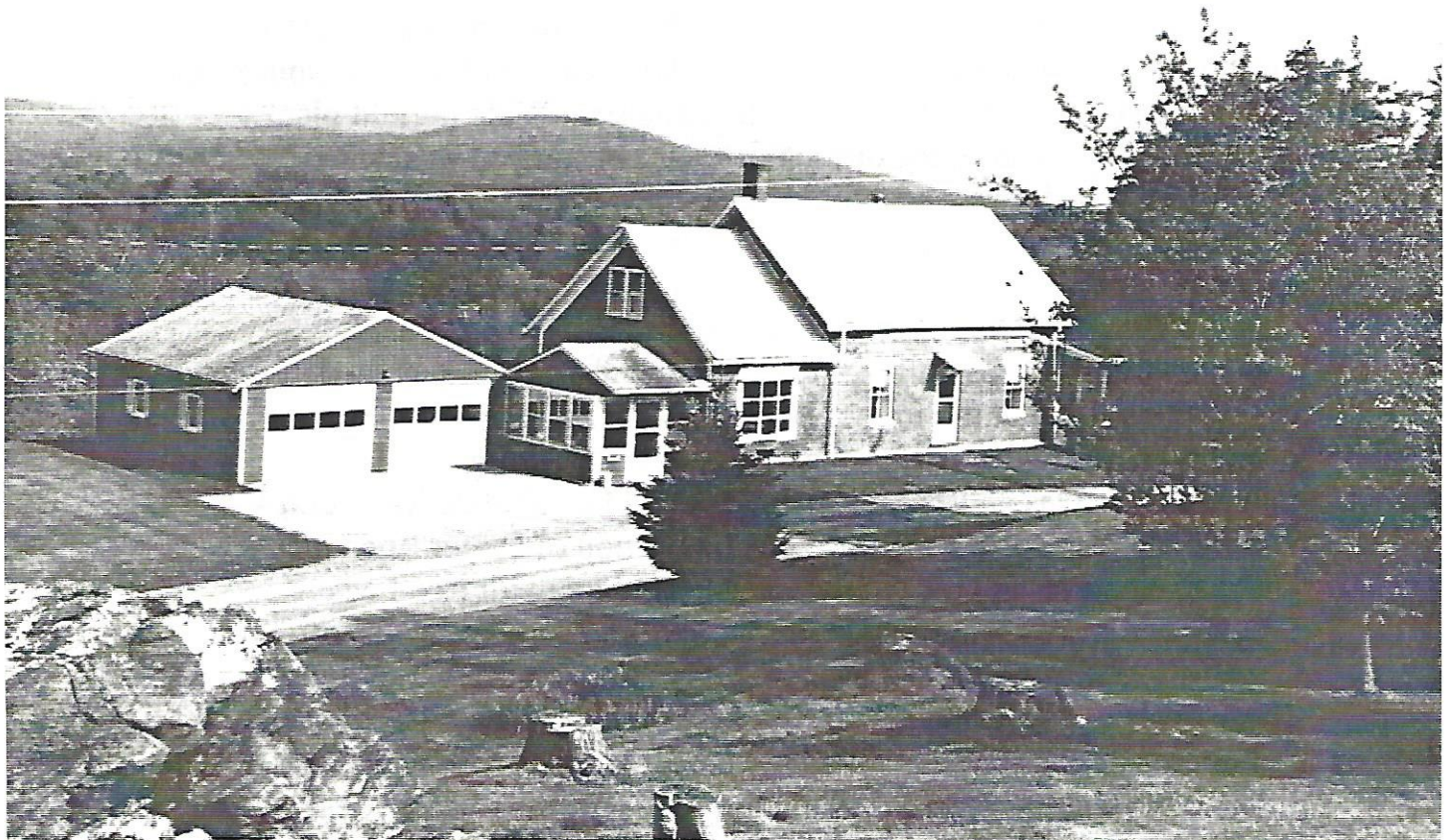
In 1950 the Thompson farm of 185 acres included a herd of 35 registered Jerseys, two horses, machinery, a sugarhouse and maple grove, and a tenant house at the foot of Bixby Hill. In addition, a 30-acre woodlot located in part of what is now the Birchwood Development was also included. This was an irregular shaped parcel that abutted Mountain View Cemetery on the north and extended to a portion of Foster Road on the south. The entrance to the woodlot was from Sand Hill Road where Tanglewood Drive is now, or in close proximity.

In 1958 another 100 acres was added to the farm, purchased from the Farrand estate off Chapin Road. The first Essex 'Centre District' school was built on this property. The cellar hole is still visible a relatively short distance beyond the northern terminus of Cedar Street in the Meadows Edge

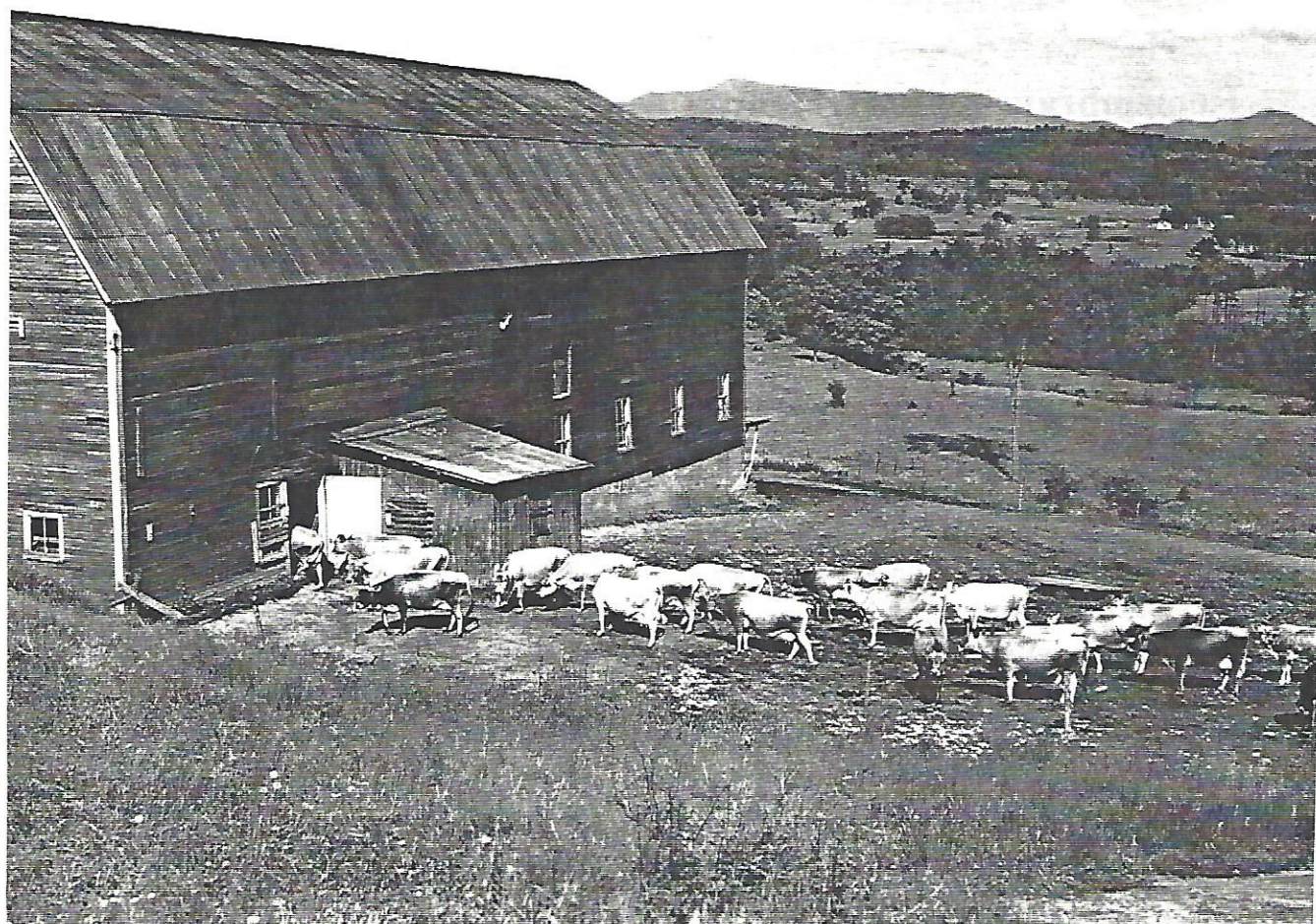
development. The original schoolhouse was moved to the Farrand homestead years ago to be used as a smokehouse and still stands. The Farrand farm was the first major house on the west side of Chapin Road coming from the intersection with Towers Road.

The barn was a huge three-story structure built about 1913. It was 100 feet long by 40 feet wide. Horse drawn wagons and later trucks would drive in the top level and roll the hay off to the mows below. The stable was on the lower level. By 1962 the Jersey herd had grown to about 90 head.

We continued to farm until 1963 when I was offered a job at the University of Vermont. The cattle and most of the machinery were sold a year later and much has changed since. The elms succumbed to Dutch elm disease; the barn collapsed in a severe windstorm in 1983 and the house was replaced with a new one located farther back from, what is now, a much busier road. The land is no longer a farm, but now is the home of many Meadows Edge families that hopefully enjoy the rural life on the old family farm.



The home of Noah and Betty Thompson for 38 years as it appeared in 1988. Saxon Hill in the background.



The barn on the Noah Thompson farm, June 9, 1953.

We are on-line.

Check out the Essex Community Historical Society web page.

Articles on Essex history: the dams on the Winooski, Page's Corner, the Fair, Essex in the Civil War, Memorial Hall and many more.

You can access past issues of the Echo, our newsletter.

You will also find links to other Vermont history sites.

Web address:
<http://www.essex.org/esxhs/esxhsfindex.htm>

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Remembrances of Mr. George Tougas, Part II

By Mr. George Tougas

Editors's note: Mr. Tougas was born in the front room of the hotel at the main intersection in Essex Center in 1929. His father, Joe (1896-1966), ran several enterprises at this location: apartments, a grocery store, a wood business, an ice business, a general garage, and a wrecker service. It was called the "Corner." Part I of his remembrances ran in the Fall 1998 Echo.

The Traverse Run

One of our winter pleasures was our mile long traverse run from the top of Bixby Hill to the Inn at the junction of Routes 15 and 128... Eight to ten would ride down each run. We had one problem, the B & L Railroad ran in those days, and if the train was coming we had to ditch the sled to stop as the brakes were not very good... We sure had a lot of fun and it was a great winter pastime. For those who do not know what a traverse is, it is a long board about 6 to 10 feet long and about 12 inches wide. It has a running board on both sides for your feet and a short sled on both ends. You steered the front sled for control. It was owned by Hollis Tomblinsen. *Editor's note: The Historical Society has one on display in the museum. See also Noah Thompson's article on Bixby Hill in this issue.*

Memorial Hall

This building...was used for many functions and meetings. Basketball was...common. In the late 30's and early 40's it was used for boxing matches and some very noted boxers came to fight there. On Thursday night were the matches and the people were jammed to the rafters and hanging out of the windows...Also about 20 men formed a pistol shooting gallery...My father joined the club...They shot the length of the hall, the [bullets] were deflected with a thick sheet of steel on a downward angle and stopped in a box of sand about a foot thick.

The Stanton Ice House

...The building was in a perfect location on the river's edge on the Essex side just above the dam, south of the IBM entrance today. This was a very large operation, as ice was in great demand at this time....The winters were colder in those years so ice froze deeper in the river. Two or three harvests were common. As a younger boy during ice harvest, this was a sight to see; they built their own ice cutting rig from a car engine and this worked very well. When the ice got to be about 20 to 24 inches thick, the ice rig would cut through the ice and cut several hundred feet one way, and then cut

the ice in the opposite direction. The blocks of ice were about 36 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 20 inches thick. The average block weighed about 300 lbs.

After an area was cut, men took long poles with points on the end and pushed the ice into a channel to the base on a long conveyor, which started under the water. The conveyor picked up the ice blocks and started their trip up into the icehouse. The conveyor could be adjusted for height as the layers of ice raised.

After each layer was completed, an old corn blower was used to blow the sawdust up into the icehouse over the ice layers. This was repeated until the icehouse was filled. About 6 inches of sawdust was put between each block of ice, and 10 inches over the layers. The sawdust acted as an insulator to preserve the ice. When they needed ice in the summer months, very little ice was lost from thawing.



The Chittenden County Garage on "the Corner" (Rts. 128 and 15) in Essex Center in 1934. George Tougas' uncle, Lucien Cote, on the left, and his father Alpherie (Joe) on the right. The buildings from left to right: Joe's office, the main garage (formerly a blacksmith shop), the shed (formerly for horses), and the Tougas home with apartments upstairs and a grocery store downstairs (formerly a hotel). Joe Tougas ran this business from 1929 to 1944 when it was sold to Ralph Preston of Essex Junction.

The Cross Road

By Anne Yandow O'Grady

The Cross Road, the Old Dump Road, or as it is now referred to, Indian Brook Road are all the same road, but they had very different meanings and destinations.

When I was growing up in Essex Town during the sixties my family lived on a farm at the corner of Old Stage Road and what is now called Indian Brook Road. My father always spoke of the road as the Cross Road. People used this road to travel to Milton by way of Brigham Hill Lane. What is now our Indian Brook Reservoir was once a road that joined Brigham Hill.

One of our (my brothers' and sisters') favorite destinations on the Cross Road, or Old Dump Road, was the town dumpsite. Once a week we would travel in our family station wagon with my dad. The number of children (there were 10 of us) would vary according to how much trash we had that week. It was always free; no dumping fees at that time. We would see our neighbors there; even the parish priest could be seen there, dumping his trash.

During the summer we would sometimes fill one of the hay wagons with the trash and my oldest brother, Dave, would drive the tractor down to the dump with all the rest of us riding on the wagon.

On one such trip my youngest brother, Danny, decided to see how far he could dangle his feet over the edge of the wagon. He promptly fell off the wagon and proceeded to crawl out from underneath.

I can remember holding my breath to see if he would make it. The others screamed for my brother, Dave, to stop the tractor. By the time Dave understood what was happening my little brother had crawled out before the rear wheels crushed him.

My youngest brother never really understood the danger he was in and the rest of us were just relieved he wasn't hurt. I don't believe my parents ever heard about that particular trip to the dump. Just like the Cross Road, things do change. My parents' home is gone, torn down to be rebuilt in another town in Vermont. But memories of our farm and the Cross Road will always stay with me.

Editor's note: The dump was located about 1/4 of a mile on the left before the present entrance to Indian Brook Park. The Yandow farmhouse was located on Old Stage Road where the Essex Alliance Church has constructed their Community and Youth Center. The barn was across the road.

Excerpts from “Essex Junction” taken from Picturing the Past: A Schoolchild’s History of Chittenden County, 1760-1900

By Craig Goliber, Andrew Pickering, Jennifer Reardon and Shannon Carroll. Third grade students of Jane Masenas and Kevin Sullivan, Founders Memorial School Essex, Vermont, 1996-1997.

Essex received its grant from New Hampshire on June 7th, 1763... The first name for Essex Junction was Hubbell’s Falls. It was changed to Painesville in 1844 when it was named after the governor of Vermont. In 1865 Painesville changed its name to Essex Junction. It was made up of the post office, railroad station, and the surrounding village.

One of the first buildings was built by a man named Mr. Long. Soon that house became a tavern. The building was torn down and Mr. Stevens built a large brick house in 1820, called the Stevens House. It had four names; they were Stevens House, Staunton House, Junction House, and Lincoln Hall. The Staunton House was the site of the first post office in 1844. Lincoln Hall is still at the five corners in Essex Junction...

...Essex Junction was once a great railroad center. Over thirty trains came and went every day. Six railroads made their junction there. Three main railroad tracks came together in Essex Junction. This brought many businesses, which helped the whole town grow. The Essex Junction trains went on the tracks of the Vermont and Canada Railroad, Rutland and Burlington Railroad, the Vermont Central Railroad, and the Burlington and Lamoille Railroad.

On November 15, 1885 a horse drawn railway system became a reality in the town. This was like a trolley. In 1893 the system was electrified.

Brick making was an important business from the 1790’s on. In 1867 Jacob Drury founded the Drury Brick Company. It made bricks for buildings throughout the state. Many of the bricks on the UVM campus, Fleming Museum, Waterman Building, Ira Allen Chapel, and the Bailey-Howe Library were made there. During its operation it produced 500 million bricks.

The Historical Society Needs You

We need volunteers at the Harriet F. Powell Museum this summer, to act as a host for visitors. The museum will be open on Saturdays and Sundays from June 5th to October 10th for four hours each day.

Please call any board member to volunteer at the museum.

We are always looking for interesting remembrances of Essex and Essex Jct. to publish in our newsletter and on our web page. It could be about your youth here, an historical site, or some unusual happening in the past.

Contact Richard or Lucille Allen at 878-3853.

We are also interested in artifacts, publications, and ephemera that reflect on Essex's past. Feel free to bring anything of this nature to the attention of any board member.

Essex Community Historical Society Board of Directors 1998-1999

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(denotes year of term expiration)**

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Essex Community Historical Society

3 Browns River Road
Essex Jct., Vermont 05452

Membership Form

Please consider 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.

+++++

Name(s) _____

Mailing address

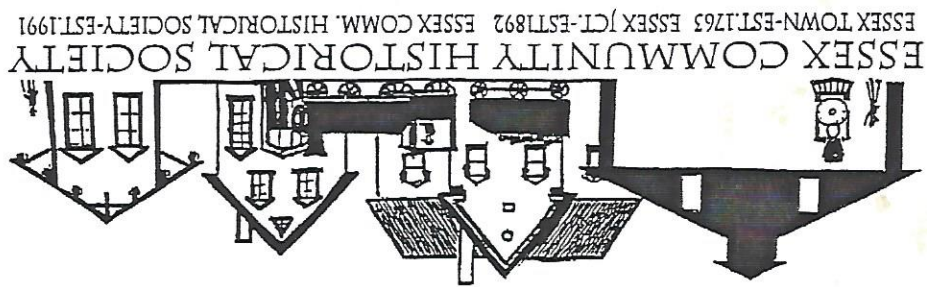
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|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual membership | \$5.00 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior membership (60 and over) | \$3.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student membership (full time) | \$3.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustained membership (lifetime) | \$100.00 |

Checks payable to the Essex Community Historical Society.
Thank You.

Echo, Spring 1999



**Essex Community
Historical Society**

Tag Sale and Raffle

**Saturday June 5, 1999
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

Please consider donating your unwanted items to our tag sale. We need items in good condition: furniture, dishes, household items, toys, etc.
Please no clothes, books or plants.

Call any one of the following people to arrange a pick up of your items:
Richard Allen, 878-3853
George Clapp, 879-0619
Dave Clough, 879-0849

Or items can be dropped off at the museum on Thursday, June 3 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

This is our biggest fundraiser of the year. Please help us out.