

# ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

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## A Message from the President • October 2000

My message starts out on a sad note. We will be losing two of our board members. George Tougas resigned recently for personal reasons. George served for a short time, but brought tremendous enthusiasm and knowledge of local history to the board. Also Barbara Mudgett will be leaving after two terms. Barbara brought to the organization stability, clear thinking and a knowledge of history of both the town and Essex Junction. Both members will be missed. Each in their own way has influenced the society for years to come.

On a more positive note, I would like to thank the many families who contributed to our spring tag sale. Because of their donations the sale was very successful.

We just received a donation which allowed us to upgrade our computer capabilities. As a result, we have connected with the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance for a museum software program called Past Perfect. This will improve our ability to catalog our collection and, in the future, to possibly connect with other small museums.

Now for some accomplishments. The Fort Ethan Allen iron gates are in the hands of Jonathan Lang to display at his business. These beautiful gates will once again announce the entrance to a significant place.

Also the Town Selectboard has approved the 1805 Schoolhouse Project. Tom Tailer's 14-year-old vision will finally become reality as the school will be renovated and displayed on the Commons.

Pat O'Connor of Weed Road presented a wonderful program about Bert Abbey. Pat is the author of the Bert Abbey chapter in The Green Mountain Boys of Summer, which contains text and pictures about those Vermonters who became professional baseball players.

We are still working on one challenge, namely, the effort to get Frank Bent's book on The History of Essex to be republished. Early estimates run about \$12,000 for 500 copies.

Next year will be our 10th anniversary as an organization. If you have any ideas on how we should celebrate, please call or write the historical society.

Enjoy the ECHO.

Respectfully,  
George Clapp, President

## The ECHO

The Newsletter of the Essex  
Community Historical Society  
Essex and Essex Junction, Vermont  
Published twice a year,  
spring and fall.

Fall 2000 Vol. 16  
Edited by Richard and Lucille Allen

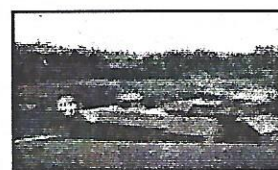
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Upcoming  
Events



# Some of My Memories: School, 1914 - 1927

By Marjorie M. Bixby

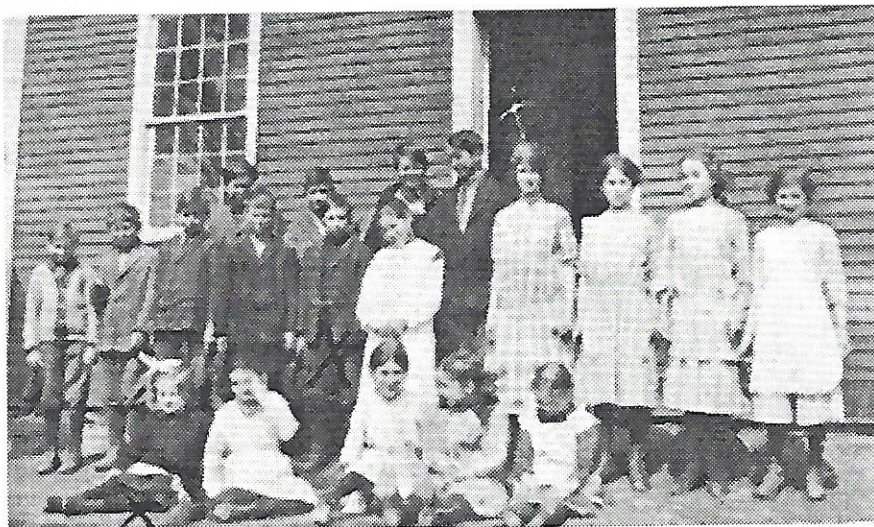
I began to go to school when I was 5 years old. At the time my family lived on a farm on Brown's River Road but the one-room school was on the East Road, now called the Osgood Hill Road. When father carried the children on the River Road, it was about 3 miles, but in fair weather about six or seven children walked "cross-lots," up a hill, beside a pond (where our father cut ice), and down the hill to Beecher School (District #12). The name came from a Beecher family who had given the lot to the town for a school.

In the school was a woodstove, a water pail and dipper, which froze in the water in the winter time. Children from five to sixteen years old were taught by the one teacher. I had learned to read at home. I don't know how - so the teacher had me read the first grade books then the second reader. My one classmate was a big tall fifteen-year-old boy who had not quite gotten through the first reader. My one memory is the amazement I felt when the two of us stood up in front by the teacher's desk and he could not read. Children's individual problems were certainly not recognized then.

Games played there were baseball for the boys and a game called "Color" by the girls.

The next year the Essex Rural schools were closed and I began my second year in the little white schoolhouse on the Common, now used as the superintendent's office. (Presently the Harriet Powell Historical Museum). We were taken to school by a school barge, not a bus. The barge looked something like a covered wagon and [was] drawn by two horses. Our parents heated bricks for the smaller children to put their feet on for the long (3 miles!) slow ride. The siding on the barge was like large curtains which could be rolled up and down as weather conditions changed.

The barge drivers were area farmers who had a team of horses and wanted to spend the time morning and late afternoon. The driver sat in a



*The Beecher School on Osgood Hill Road. Marjorie McNall Bixby in the front row, far left. Her brother Harold is in back, in front of the doorway. (Yesterday in Essex, by Harriet Farnsworth Powell, page 35)*

front seat separated from the rest of the barge. Of course there were discipline problems in the barge as there are in buses now. The usual punishment was to have to sit up front with the driver or, in extreme cases, to be put off the barge and made to walk home.

Of course, it took some time for all the "country" children to adjust to the change. There were certain advantages. In those years there was a high school in the old Essex Classical Institute building where the elementary school is now. There was a physical education teacher who taught all pupils from first grade through high school. I remember how much the younger children enjoyed dancing around a tall Maypole in the center of the Common. Each child had a colored streamer and as we danced in and out around the pole our parents proudly watched as the pole became colored with beautiful colors.

Reading was the main subject in the early grades. Numbers were learned but, as I think back now, much time was wasted by simple "busy work," - like the teacher tracing a huge number with chalk on a child's desk and [being]



given a box of shelled corn and having to cover the outline of the number with the corn. The first and second grade teacher walked around the room with a ruler always in her hand. If a child was doing anything wrong, down came the ruler on the backs of his hands. I was really afraid of our second grade teacher.

Grades three and four were in the other room in the same little white building. Here an older teacher was in charge. You did what she asked you to do as she was very strict but very fair and sincere in wanting her children to learn - and they learned!

The punishments were quite severe but probably justified. My sixth grade was also spent in her room - she also used a large ruler and even made bad boys sit on the hearth of the very hot woodstove - they usually promised quite quickly to become "good" boys!

The high school principal did not have much supervision over the lower grades. A superintendent visited perhaps once a month and three town school directors hired and paid the teachers. In high school sports were popular but mostly for boys. There were baseball and basketball teams all through high school. Girls' activities were more limited - gymnastics being the main event for girls. There were probably six or seven regular teachers in high school with a music teacher coming in one day a week. By now boys had woodworking and girls had home economics.

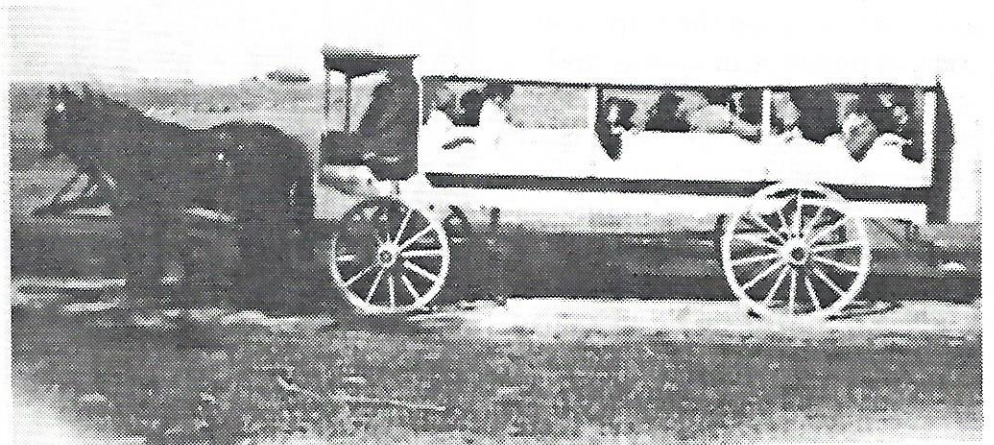
Most pupils had to bring their lunches with a hot soup or one hot dish prepared and served by the home ec. classes. A bowl of hot soup cost 3 cents. We usually had 15 minute recesses and one hour at noon time. In winter throwing snowballs was a favorite sport, also skating down on Alder Brook.

I believe our school day was somewhat longer than now - beginning at 9:00 a.m. and staying until 4:00 in spring and fall and letting out at 3:30 in the winter months. School could be canceled for the same reasons as now - big snowstorms,

extreme cold, etc. Our spring vacation was called a "mud vacation," the time depending on when the dirt roads broke up and even horses had difficulty getting the barge through. I think it was probably about 1924 or 1925 when automobiles or trucks began to be used for transportation.

### Winter

Kerosene filled lamps and wood and coal were used during these years in my home. "Hanging lamps" became popular over dining room tables or in the halls - with of course, a



*When the district schools closed, the children were transported to Essex Center by barge. Here is a spring and fall school barge in Essex. This picture was taken on Towers Road. In the winter the barge box was placed on a set of sleds. My favorite barge story is a winter story. When the barge went into a snow bank, the students leaned on the low side, tipping the barge into the deeper snow. This enabled them to be very, very late arriving at the school house, if they arrived at all! (Yesterday in Essex, by Harriet Farnsworth Powell, page 35)*

kerosene lamp under a fancy shade. In the evening in my early childhood, we gathered around the piano in the front parlor and my mother played and my brothers and I sang. My father always read and when bedtime came he always read a story to me. "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" became my favorite. I am sure I inherited my love for reading and music from these early experiences. Maybe that was how I learned to read from listening so much.

This was the time of year when farmers "harvested" ice for the coming summer. They sawed huge blocks of ice and used ice tongs to lift them on to horse-drawn sleds, packed them in the ice house on each farm, covered carefully with sawdust or straw and kept tightly closed until spring. Homemade ice cream was made possible by this ice. It was also used to put around cans of milk and cream in the tank in the



milk house.

For outdoor fun sliding down hill on sleds, jack-jumpers and toboggans were popular. Also clearing off the snow from rivers or ponds provided good skating. To go to town a sleigh with a good driving horse with fur robes around you was necessary to get through the snow-banked roads. Snow plows were drawn by teams of horses by the road men.

Partly for pleasure and partly to earn money, my brother trapped muskrats and beavers along the river banks. They baited the traps with pieces of parsnips or carrots and usually used snowshoes to go to their traps before school each morning. Sometimes snowstorms were so large my father and my brother would (have) to shovel paths in order to get out into the barn to do chores. Of course my brothers had to help milk the cows, feed the horses and pigs and hens. My mother and I were never expected to help with farm work. We made maple syrup and my mother made maple sugar and sugar cakes to sell, boiling the syrup to sugar on the big kitchen stove over a wood fire.

About 1920, my father sold the farm and we moved to the "Center" and lived in the little brown house now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Tucker (on the west side of Towers Road, just up from the Memorial Hall). It was from there that I began to use the little library which was in the Memorial Hall. The librarian there was an avid reader also and helped me choose books. She once said she thought I had read all the suitable books there. I really should give credit to Mrs. Jennie E. N. Greene, the only librarian I knew

when the Essex Free Library was in the old Town Hall. She made such an impression on me. At the time she was living in the white house right across from the Memorial Hall. Her favorite expression was "If I want to do something or go somewhere, I never let the weather stop me." At 90 years of age, she was still just as firm! It had



(L. to r) Marjorie M. Bixby, Assistant Superintendent Dale Lanphear, and Kathryn Bigelow on the occasion of the teachers' retirement June 6, 1973. (Courtesy of Phyllis Forsey)

been a great source of satisfaction to see this lovely old building restored and the windows looking just the way they were.

The big Congregational Church (now the Essex Free Library) was a gathering place for church suppers, hot lunch programs later on and PTA meetings. This building now being restored will help keep the Center an authentic historic spot for Essex.

*Editor's note: the preceding piece was written by Marjorie McNall Bixby (1909-1989) in 1989 for some Essex Middle School students making a video on local history. The project was under the direction of Carolyn W. Pillsbury. According to Phyllis Forsey, daughter of Marjorie and Rollin Bixby, her mother taught in Williston at the Oak Hill School and 23 years in the Essex town schools. At her retirement in 1973, she was a 6th grade English and reading teacher.*



# Superintendent of Schools Albert D. Lawton Remembered

By Richard Allen

Mr. Lawton was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth College. During his thirty-nine-year career in Vermont education, he taught at Lyndon Institute, was principal at Chester High School, supervising principal at Proctor, Superintendent of Windsor Northwest District and Superintendent of Chittenden Central District (1935-1957). He maintained residence in the Village of Essex Junction, where he had long been one of the community's leading citizens.

Stanley Knapp, long term principal of Albert D. Lawton School in Essex Junction, remembers Mr. Lawton as a proper man with a certain old-fashioned courtliness and meticulous standards, as shown in the following story: "When Ray Tucker was principal in Williston, he told the story of one of those hot spring days when you could wring the water out of the air. ... Everybody was perspiring, and Ray finally took his jacket off. ... And he put it on the back of the chair. He didn't undo his tie or anything. Mr. Lawton came by the door with a steely-eyed look and cleared his throat and said, 'Mr. Tucker.' And he pulled on his jacket tails. Mr. Tucker put his jacket on. You were properly dressed; you didn't sit on the desks, not in Mr. Lawton's schools. ... These things, Mr. Lawton felt, made a difference because teachers had an image to maintain and set a good example."

Despite Mr. Lawton's rectitude and formal manner, he practiced interesting innovations at in-service meetings. Mr. Knapp recalls: "He was somewhat partial to having fun at Chittenden Central teacher meetings. ... He usually put Beryl Gardener in charge of the festivities. It included singing songs and playing musical chairs. ... Some of these grand ladies who had been teaching forever, starting out in one room schoolhouses, with age

had become rather portly — seeing them waddle around was really rather funny. Whether you thought it was the thing to do or not, you were expected to play musical chairs and sing 'We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder.' I remember this vividly."

"...He was an honest-to-goodness champion of quality education for children," Mr. Knapp adds. Former Williston student Karen Peterson Boyden testifies to Mr. Lawton's significance to even the smallest members of the community when she says, "...He was such a grand man, a much loved man with a shock of white hair who was often at school. He loved children so very much and did much behind the scenes to make our years at Williston Central School special. In the spring of 1952 our first grade class put on the play 'Goldilocks' and he was the guest of honor."

His son, Fred Lawton, recounts that his father's favorite hobby outside of school business was vegetable gardening. Mr. Lawton would tend the garden in bib overalls and a tie. He wore a dirty old snap brim hat that Mrs. Lawton would sometimes donate to a rummage sale and Mr. Lawton more than once bought it back.

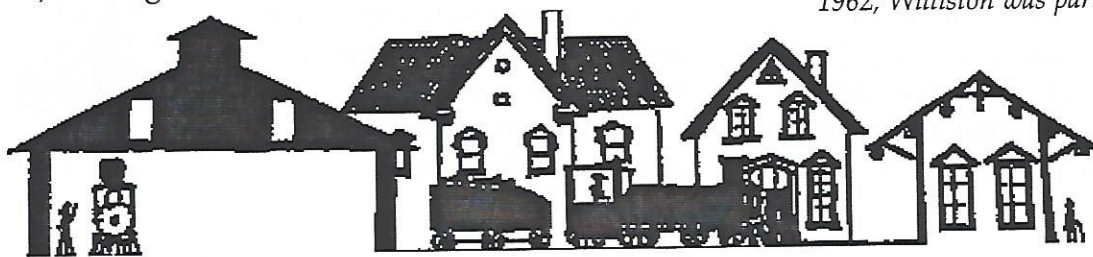
In a testament to how the role of the superintendent has changed over the years, Fred Lawton recalls how he would accompany his father as he made the rounds of the various schools to deliver paper and pencils at the beginning of each school year.

Mr. Lawton also had a strong interest in history and politics and he did serve in the state legislature after his retirement from the superintendency.

Albert D. Lawton died on February 24, 1981, at the age of 88.

*(Excerpted from the author's upcoming book on the history of Williston Central School.*

*Until the formation of Chittenden South School District in 1962, Williston was part of the Chittenden Central School District.)*





# Green Meadow Farm

By George Clapp

Do you know where Green Meadow Farm is in Essex? It is no longer an operating dairy farm, but you can see it on Route 15 near the Jericho line.

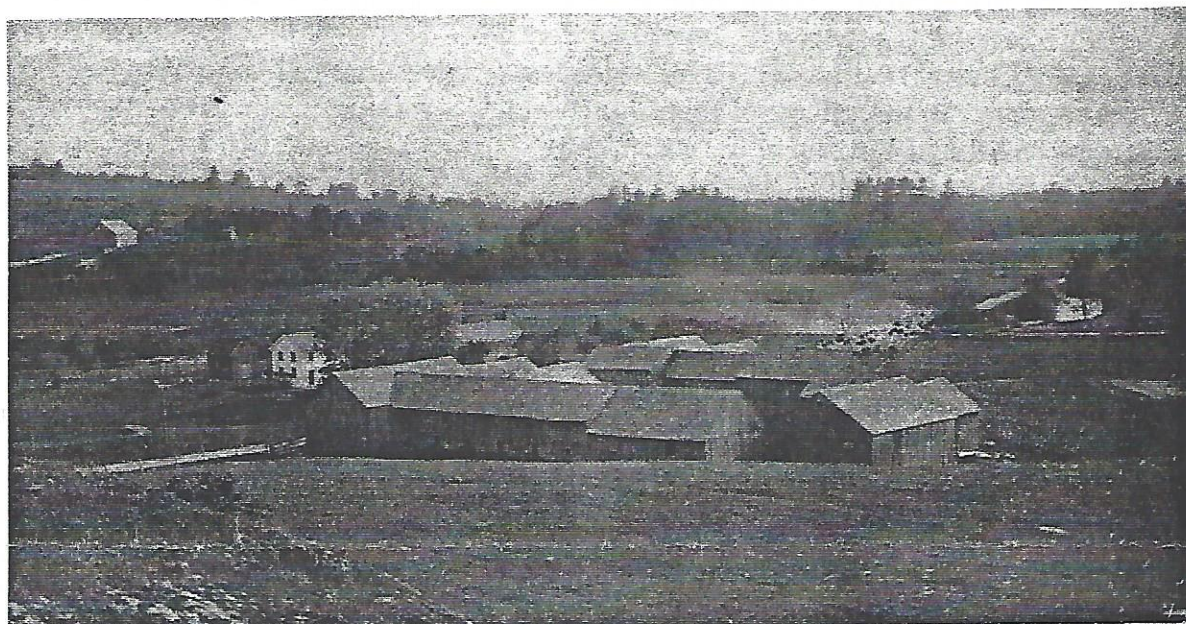
The farm belongs to John "Jack" Whitcomb. It has been in the Whitcomb family for the past 152 years. Jack's great-grandfather Joshua migrated from New Hampshire and settled in this valley in 1848. He purchased five smaller farms and established Green Meadow Farm as 600 acres.

The part of the house that faces Route 15 was originally the Sinclair Inn, built in the 1700s. Joshua proceeded to build an addition on the back of the inn. Then he extended the building with a cheese

house. Cheese was made year-round on the first floor and stored on the second. Chimneys were located at each end of the room so the cheese wouldn't freeze in the winter. The cheddar cheese aged all year, then moved to Jericho to be shipped to Boston.

The farm grew and prospered. Eventually there were 13 outbuildings across the road from the house. Besides the cheese making, Green Meadow Farm also included a dairy and a

of Morgan horses. The maple sugaring typically produced 125 to 300 gallons of syrup, depending on the season, and ended in 1966. Large vegetable gardens could produce up to 300 bushels of potatoes for winter time!

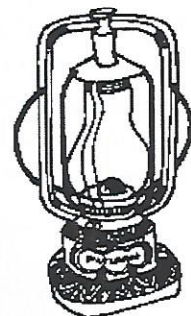
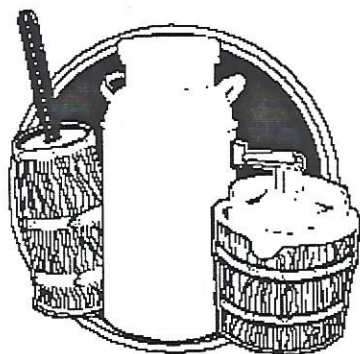


*A view of Green Meadow Farm, circa 1900, looking toward the southwest. Weed Road at the right of the photo, meets Route 15 at the Browns River bridge. Saxon Hill to the left.*

The dairy herd required much work to keep the cows healthy and content. Each week 15 bags of corn and oats had to be prepared for the herd. The corn and oats were taken to the Red Mill in Jericho for processing. There the feed would be ground and mixed with bran and molasses. As the dairy herd grew, Harold, Jack's father, eventually had to bring the milk to Brown's River Creamery, just east of the Weed Road intersection.

The farm also had an ash house where meats were smoked and pork was salted down to keep for the winter.

Disaster struck Green Meadow in September, 1915. Lightning hit the



maple sugaring operation, as well as the breeding



farm, causing the full silos and hay-packed barns to ignite. All 13 buildings were destroyed. A saw mill was constructed to produce over 100,000 board feet of lumber for new buildings. Jack's grandfather, William, built the horse barn first, then left for World War I. After the war in 1920, the cow barn was constructed.

Tough times came again with the 1927 flood and the Great Depression. William was forced to sell the farm in 1932. Jack's father moved the family to Essex Junction to work at a typical job. Soon Harold became restless and rented a small Williston farm in 1933. He wanted to return a lifestyle that he loved.

In four short years, Harold built up his resources again and acquired a dairy herd of 60 cows. And on May 1, 1937, the Whitcomb family packed up their belongings and animals to move back to Green Meadow Farm. They came off Chittenden Road onto North Williston Road, but the cows refused to cross the bridge over the Winooski River. Neighbors along the road helped the Whitcombs get their animals over the bridge. Then they took Saxon Hill Road from River Road to Route 15, turned right and arrived at their old home.

The Burlington Savings Bank, which held the lease on the farm, notified Harold that the lease was only good for six years. He could either buy the farm or sell it. Harold borrowed money from a family member, Consuelo Bailey, the first female lieutenant governor of Vermont. With this money he bought the farm and paid back his debt within four years.

From 1848 to 1942, the farm relied on horses, oxen and people to perform labor. When Harold needed a tractor for a chore such as filling the corn silos, he rented one. But then in 1942, Green Meadow Farm got a tractor of its own.

Seasonal labor also helped out greatly. Canadian crews came down to help cut the hay by hand. They started early in the morning, standing side by side, and cut everything in front of them until they reached the other side of the meadow. Meanwhile, local laborers helped with such chores as husking corn. And, of course, family members pitched in as well. When Jack was six years old, he helped milk the cows by hand. Two teams of three milked the entire herd. Then electricity took over in the early 1930s.

Today Jack lives in Jericho with his wife

Essex Community Historical Society  
Board of Directors  
2000-2001  
(denotes year of term expiration)

George R. Clapp, President (01)  
18 Sage Circle  
879-0619

Diane Digennaro, Vice President (02)  
47 Brigham Hill Rd.  
878-0276

Lucille Allen, Secretary (02)  
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878-3853

Sherry Norton (01)  
9 Maplelawn Drive  
879-7334

Eva Clough, Treasurer (01)  
42 Brigham Hill Rd.  
879-0849

Tobe Zalinger (01)  
6 Browns River Rd.  
879-1249

David Clough (03)  
42 Brigham Hill Rd.  
879-0849

Janet Wood (01)  
31 Mansfield Drive  
878-5793

Kay Helfrich (02)  
2 Mohawk Ave.  
878-4417

Clinton Russell (03)  
140 Browns River Rd.  
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Ann Yandow (02)  
203 Main St.  
878-5529

Ray Reynolds (02)  
88 Park St.  
878-2193,  
878-2294

Polly Whitcomb (03)  
P.O. Box 5154  
Essex Jct, VT 05452  
878-4479



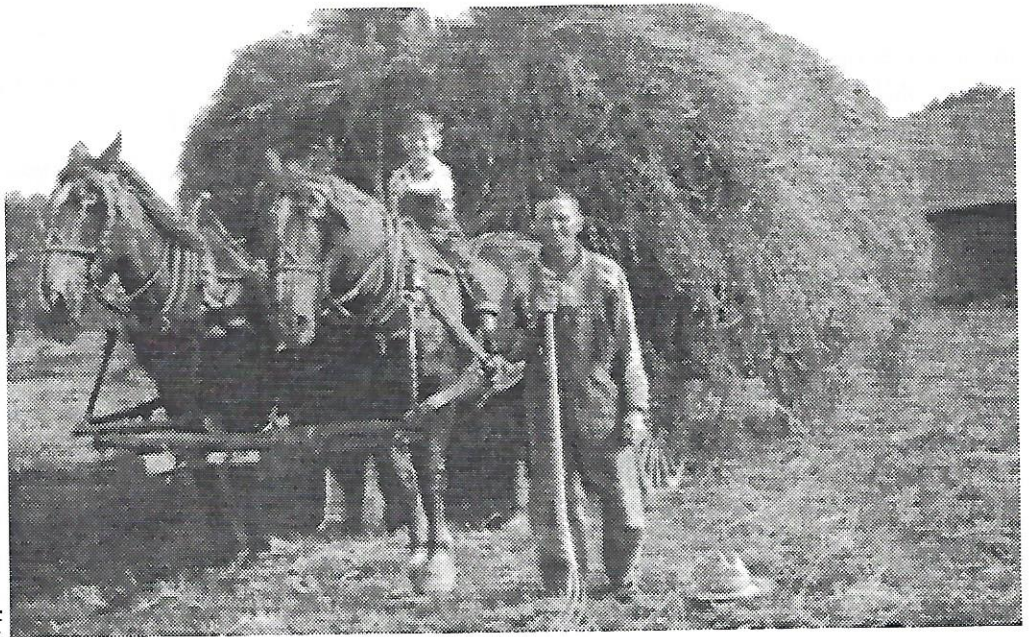
Bette. There are many occasions when you can catch a smile on Jack's face, and that's because he's thinking of his time on the farm.

### Other Memories

When Jack was growing up there wasn't much traffic on Route 15. If you needed to go to Burlington, Benedict's touring car picked up passengers from Underhill to Burlington on a daily basis. All you had to do was flag him down and hope he didn't have too many passengers.

Jack has fond memories of his school bus. It was his neighbor's Buick touring car. He also recalls Katherine Wool picking up students in her bread truck equipped with wooden benches. She did this for students who lived along Susie Wilson Road on the other side of town.

Because the Whitcombs lived so close to the



*Jack Whitcomb and his father, Harold, in 1935.*

Jericho line, they had strong ties with this community via the Red Mill, the church, and the Jericho General Store. In fact a store employee would come to the farm on Friday, take the order, and return on Saturday with the groceries.

## Norman Woodworth's Journal

*by Eva Clough*

The Essex Community Historical Society has recently received copies of nine diaries spanning 1850-1859 written by Norman Woodworth. Woodworth was born in Essex in 1831 and married Lois Curtis. He was a teacher in local School District 13, a logger, farmer and carpenter. He attended the Essex Center Baptist Church and fought for the Union in the Civil War. He died on May 25, 1864 and was buried in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His diaries are available to read at the Essex Community Historical Society. Below is the beginning of Woodworth's first volume:

### THE JOURNAL

"The Journal is intended to be a book in which will be recorded events of note. Some of most daily occurrence (sic). Some days when there is nothing worth recording, then that day will be passed over. The weather, remarkable snowstorms, rainstorms, ie. (sic) will receive a place. Any remarkable doings of Congress, after this date will be recorded. Events of a foreign nature will be noticed in the Journal. Also domestic concerns will have a place here. A Journal is an article which every person ought to be possessed (sic) of. He can record events which in afteryears (sic), perhaps, will be of service to him. Suppose for instance, he has recorded the 'Fugitive Slave law,' someone wants to know when it was he can refer to his Journal and find out when it was."

*N. Woodworth • Essex, Nov. 11, 1850*



# Essex Community Historical Society

3 Browns River Road  
Essex Jct., Vermont 05452

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

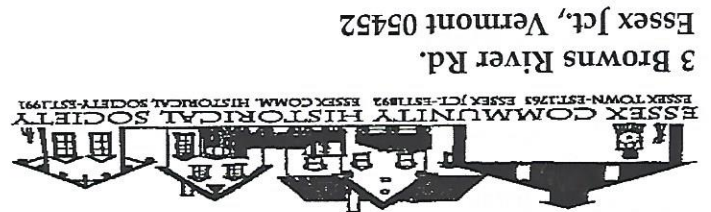
___ Individual membership	\$5.00
___ Family membership	\$10.00
___ Senior membership (60 and over)	\$3.00
___ Student membership (full time)	\$3.00
___ Individual-lifetime	\$100.00

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

ECHO, Fall 2000



Dave and Eva Clough  
42 Brigham Hill Road  
Essex Junction VT 05452



### Christmas Tree Lighting on the Town Common

Come join the Essex Community Historical Society on Friday, December 1st at 6:30 p.m. for the Tree Lighting Ceremony. Christmas carols will be sung. Following the tree lighting everyone is invited over to Memorial Hall for more singing and refreshments.

### Vermont Historical Society Museum

Pavilion Building  
Montpelier

Ongoing Exhibit: Generation of Change: Vermont, 1820-1850



Change is a constant in our society, but the degree of change and the aspect of life it affects can bring great benefits as well as conflict and uneasiness. What happens in a democracy such as the United States that reveres the ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality when its citizens disagree on basic societal issues? During the period from 1820 to 1850 sweeping changes occurred in America's basic institutions: church, government, and work. At the same time, U.S. territory doubled in size and transportation systems improved. This exhibition will examine how Vermonters grappled with these changes, particularly with the issues of slavery, diverse religious beliefs, the role of government, and a drastically changing economy.