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THE ECHO

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

It has been a fun and eventful year at ECHS. Planning is underway for the 250th anniversary of the Town Charter in 2013. A committee has been named by the Town Select Board and ECHS will be involved with all the planning. This ECHO has an article on Timothy Bliss, who was one of the first Essex settlers to benefit from the stability created by the creation of the Town of Essex.

Our annual meeting was held Tuesday, October 2 at the Brownell Library Kolvoord Room in Essex Junction. Rob Grandchamp, a Civil War buff and author, presented a talk about the war and its impact on Vermont.

The Board wants to thank all the volunteers who helped keep the Harriet Powell Museum open on schedule in 2012. We hosted a group from the local Red Hat Ladies, many of whom shared fond memories of growing up in Essex. Several individuals also contacted us to visit or ask about family roots and connections. The museum was "face-lifted" with a new paint job and some repairs this summer—thanks to the Town of Essex for a job well done.

ECHS will soon be taking possession of some "remnants" from the recently demolished Molloy-Delano House at Butler's Corners. Hopefully we will be able to mount an interesting display to show how a frame house with thick pine walls was built in the 1820s could have survived into the 21st century.

ECHS has also participated in developing several updated "history walks" in the town and village, in collaboration with "Heart and Soul" (a 2 year Orton Foundation community-building grant), Railroad Avenue Recess (village), and local schools. Interest in how Essex looked and felt in the "old days" seems to be growing.

Part of the fun of serving on the Board is the sense of discovery. Whether it's accepting a surprise donation, identifying people/houses in old photos, or collecting memories from long-time residents, there is always something new to shed light on our Essex heritage!

Tim Jerman, Co-President

Eva Clough, Co-President

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2012-2013



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TIMOTHY BLISS: ESSEX'S UNKNOWN STATESMAN

By—Tim Jerman

Timothy Bliss moved to Essex in the early 1780s with several brothers, his wife, and four eldest sons, settling on fertile land near the Brown's River on what is now the Weed Road, encompassing Bliss Hill. The oldest of six children born to Peletiah and Hepzibah Bliss, Timothy was born in Lebanon, New London County, Connecticut on March 22, 1745. Married to Zerviah Williams, they had nine children in all (seven boys!) from 1767 to 1784, not an untypical size family for the era.

Timothy Bliss was also a veteran of the Revolutionary War, although this assertion is shrouded in some mystery. He is recognized by DAR but has not (until now) received the remembrances given to local veterans Abram Stevens, Simon Tubbs, Stephen Butler, David Day, William Ingraham and a handful of others. A family genealogy clearly details his service in 1780 under Col. Ira Allen, with missions in 1781, and quartermaster duties until 1783, when the war ended. Bliss is one of the many Revolution-era patriots whose service is in question due to lax record-keeping and the in and out service nature of the conflict. It is very likely that he moved temporarily to Manchester, Vermont, after the Royalton Raid of 1780 made the Champlain Valley too dangerous, served from there, and returned to Essex with his family around 1783.

Until his death in 1817, Bliss was an Essex founding father in every way. Zerviah also certainly qualifies as a founding mother! He was elected one of three selectmen in 1788, and served nine terms in the legislature, both before and after statehood! These were staggered terms in 1787, 1788, 1792, 1796, 1799, 1800, 1801, 1803, and 1810, 1811. Terms were one year; the General Assembly met twice a year for about three weeks each session, moving around the state until 1808, when Montpelier became the permanent location. Actually, he may have served ten terms; a Timothy Bliss represented Manchester in 1783, and it was almost certainly the same person, as his commanding officers confirmed by other sources also served around the same time.

Bliss was a known leader in Essex and the State of Vermont. Here, he was responsible for laying out the spot of the new town meeting place in 1795 (now the Essex Free Library site) and Essex Common. A pious

Congregationalist, Bliss superintended the establishment of the first church in Essex for the "First Ecclesiastical Society." Earlier, he had a bit part in a well-publicized diary entry by circuit-riding minister Nathan Perkins, who had traveled to Vermont from Hartford, CT in the spring of 1789 to help establish the church. Perkins did not have a high opinion of Ethan Allen, who had rebelled against the established church with his book *Reason, the Oracle of Man*. Perkins thought of Allen as an "awful infidel, one of ye wickedest men yet ever walked this guilty globe" (ouch!). After spending a night as a guest of Bliss in Essex in 1789, Perkins (and Bliss) rode to Burlington and visited Ethan's fresh burial site, uttering his famous remark: "I stopped and looked at his grave with a pious horror!" Bliss, unlike Allen, stayed true to the church and helped establish its foothold in Essex. Bliss also certainly would have known Lorenzo "Crazy" Dow, who got his start in Vermont as an itinerant Methodist preacher who later became famous for his wanderings, writings, and mesmerizing sermons. A generation of American mothers named their sons Lorenzo in his memory, including Lorenzo Whitcomb of Essex, one of our most prominent citizen farmers of the 19th century.

Bliss's greatest service to Essex came in 1804, when land claims were causing huge problems. The issue was that many of the original Ira Allen "Onion River Land Company" deeds held by town residents were faulty or questionable. Allen's personal affairs were a mess at this time, and creditors were moving aggressively to seize his assets. The town authorized a new survey to settle the issue once and for all. The three people chosen to do this work were Timothy Bliss, Abram Stevens, and John Johnson. All three were among the most respected professionals in the entire state (more on these two in future issues). The survey and review of individual land claims took three years, but in 1807 the completed map settled land boundaries and became the basis for all transactions thereafter. Still, some people, including a niece of Bliss, lost their land and were evicted from

their property.

In the legislature, Bliss was a leader as the Republic of Vermont (1777-1791) transitioned to statehood. At the time, Governor Thomas Chittenden and the Allens were involved in a delicate balancing act with the US Congress, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Canada. Eventually, statehood won out, largely because Vermont was needed in the Union as a non-slave state to balance the impending entry of Kentucky into the Union. This made Congress finally pressure New York to give up its land claims in Vermont for a small financial settlement, paving the way for Vermont to become the 14th state. On October 7, 1790, a state convention was called in Bennington to ratify the US Constitution. Although not in the legislature that year (tavern owner Joel Woodworth was), Bliss was chosen to represent Essex. He was a lawyer, and though little is known about his legal training, it's safe to say that he received his "Esquire" status as a young man in Connecticut before his move to Vermont. His name is one of the 105 of 109 delegates who signed the document on January 6, 1791, which set off celebrations around the state. One toast to statehood was recorded: "May the Vermonters become as eminent in the arts of peace as they have been glorious in those of war." Only 12 of the 109 delegates had been present in Windsor in 1777 at the convention which declared Vermont's independence.

Bliss's nephew, Amos Bliss, Jr., got his moment of fame years later in 1831. He was the plaintiff in an anti-Masonic church trial against Daniel Dunlop during the height of the anti-Masonic fever sweeping Vermont and the northeast. Dunlop was acquitted, but the trial was recorded by Essex Historian, L. C. Butler as an event that was filled with high emotion and drama.

The Bliss name is now a common one in Vermont. Descendents Samuel and Alanson Bliss also served the Town of Essex in the legislature. Timothy and Zerviah are buried in the old cemetery across from the library, surrounded by the next generations of family. At

the bottom of his simple marker is the inscription "Prepare to meet thy God." Timothy Bliss has earned the right to be remembered as our first statesman.

Note: Much of the background for this article came from Maureen Sexton Labenski of Stowe, who grew up in Essex Junction. She is directly descended from both Timothy Bliss and Abram Stevens!

References:

A History of Essex. Frank Bent, 1963.

Bliss Genealogy.

Essex Centennial History. L. C. Butler, 1883.

Nathan Perkins' Diary: *A Narrative of a tour through the State of Vermont from April 27 to June 12, 1789.*

Personal recollections of Polly Whitcomb McEwing.

Out and About

Board members displayed Essex Civil War Veterans' family stories, pictures and our Memorial Hall history at the Vermont Historical Society Expo at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds in June. Visitors were attracted to the haversack and many sampled the hard tack staple for soldiers.

Pictured below are Polly and Laurie at the Essex Community Historical Society booth.



Essex Community Historical Society showed pictures of the Five Corners and Railroad Ave history at the Block Party in July. They were set up to the tracks and people stopped to look at the display and to talk to members.

DONATIONS

Robert Wood: \$100 in memory of George Beecher, a Civil War Veteran.

Sherry and Hubie Norton: cast iron chimney cleaning door with *Drury and EJ* on it.

Laurie Jordan: Essex Junction High School Prospectus booklet for the 1921 –1922 school year.

Lois Taylor: Little League posters including registration names c. 1976.

Will Parkinson: Alder Brook Valley Farms bottle caps and a picture of an Essex barn for the railroad from the Rail Photo Service.

Laura F. Carney: pictures and papers of the Farrand family, who had lived at the Farrand homestead/ Vermont Toy Farm on Chapin Road.

Lorraine Hofmann: two pictures of her relatives at the Drury Farm on River Road.

Suzanna Olsen: poster dated October 31, 1946 entitled "Notice from Upholstering and Furniture Repairs."

John Duby: 1938 class picture at Essex Center High School.

Nancy Nichols Bartlett: old deeds of her family's property at the present Price Chopper site, other deeds, 1870s church titles, and Suburban List articles.

Gerry Fox: Central Vermont Railway Inc. Log, station records of train movements, Hubbel Falls bridge maps, and his Butler's Corners research.

Ann Yandow: a Lever Butter Worker Device (for getting buttermilk out of butter), an insurance sign, and a collection of documents that she had at her 203 Main Street residence. The Lever Butter Worker Device had removable legs for easy take down and set up. Its 20 inch wide size could work 15 pounds and cost \$5.00.



Above left: the former Fairview Farm on Upper Main Street in Essex Junction. While it has since been torn down, the homestead house remains. Upper right, the Lever Butter Worker Device.

THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

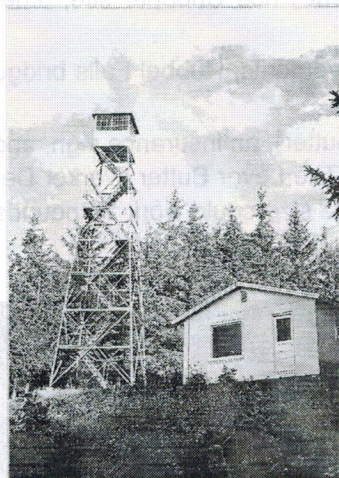
*Have **you** looked in your attic or basement lately to see if there is something you can donate to the Harriet Farnsworth Historical Museum?*

SHARE YOUR MEMORIES

SAXON HILL PICNIC

BY—John Duby

Another thing I remember was Saxon Hill (which was just before the Route 15 Brown's River Bridge). There was no fire tower....There was a cabin at the top. The fire warden at the time was John Moiles. And he had a hobby of photography and he used to take pictures. Well, he chose pictures that he had taken during a thunderstorm where it was down over the town. And he could see the lightening in the photograph....Technically, time exposure to get the lightening. And also we used to do this several times during the summer. We would hike up there along with Orange Crush and bologna sandwiches for a picnic. Usually me and my three sisters. But other people went up, too. I have pictures of other people who went back there. Because it was something to do on the weekends; hike Saxon Hill.



(Saxon Hill Fire Tower-
Photo courtesy of William P Hall)



The former ECI, before 1951.

ESSEX CLASSICAL INSTITUTE

The Essex Classical Institute Board is all that remains of what used to be a boarding school which was the original school system in town...The old boarding house was across—it's an apartment house now I guess. But the legal entity of the Essex Classical Institute still exists and we actually still own about five acres of land (which is the field across from Route 128). We (the ECI Board) still meet once a year and we have investments of about \$170,000.00. Plus we get a yearly income, which we give out in scholarships to Essex High School graduates who still reside in Essex Center. We have a scholarship committee who makes the decision on who gets the scholarships....The intention is to use it towards college....So they can use it for transportation; they can use it for books; they can use it for tuition...The Essex Classical Institute Board meets once a year. We elect officers and talk over our investments and who to give our money to from year to year....We usually give it to the Essex Library and...we thought each school year each school will get some money (like the Essex Elementary School and Founders).

John's Essex High School building, previously ECI, became a graded and junior high school until it was torn down in 1972. Its bell still hangs over the entry to the "School on the Hill."

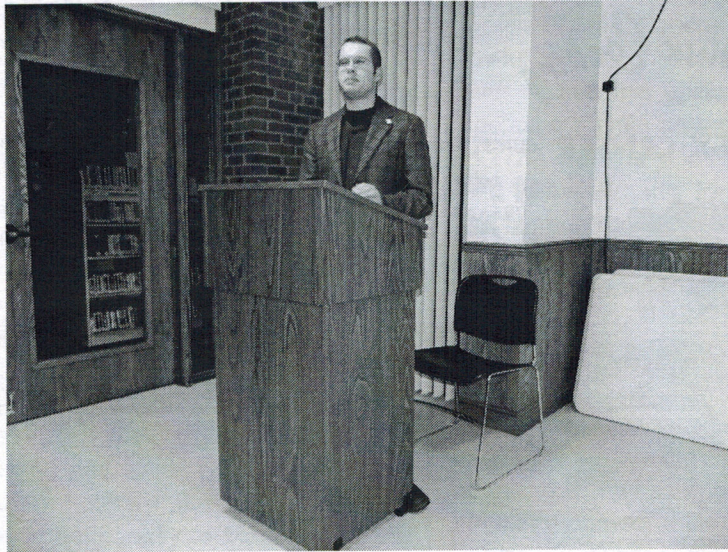
Please send us your memories, and you may see them printed in an upcoming edition of the ECHO!

Pictures gladly accepted; please let us know if you would like them returned.

WE SHARE OUR HISTORY

Welcome to new board members Jennifer Gilbert, Rob Grandchamp and Thad Wołosinski!

Rob Grandchamp was the speaker at the Annual Meeting in October. Grandchamp's topic was a Vermont Civil War soldier's son's memories of his father, Captain Orville Bixby of Chelsea and the founding of the Sons of Veterans in Vermont. Grandchamp serves as a commander of Stannard Camp No. 2, Sons of Union Veterans, which is based in Chittenden County. He is the author of nine American history books, and he is currently writing a book about Captain Orville Bixby who died at the Wilderness. Grandchamp also brought some of his Civil War memorabilia, which folks enjoyed looking at.



Above—Rob Grandchamp speaking at the annual meeting.

Sherry and Polly chose and wrote about 15 museum pictures from before 1969 for the Burlington Free Press to scan for their Champlain pictorial book. This book will contain pictures of Chittenden County from the 1800s up until 1969. Tim also assisted the book's planners to access 15 more Essex Sawyer photos from VHS.

Many thanks to the volunteers who help keep the museum open and running during the summer: Ina Isham, Ruth Ann Beers, Mary Willard, Ellen and Thad Wołosinski, and Eva Blake: the summer volunteers, whose help is appreciated so very much! Thanks also goes to Clint Russell who continues to collect the obituaries of Essex residents for the museum. Anyone interested in volunteering, please contact Kathy Dodge at 878-4272.

DO YOU HAVE A RECIPE TO SHARE?

Do you have a family recipe that has been handed down generation to generation that you would like to share? Please pass it along!

MOCK CRANBERRY PIE

Glenna Matthews

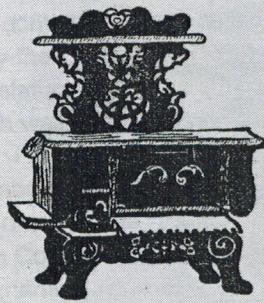
2 c. cranberries, cut
2 c. sugar
1 heaping Tbsp. flour
1 tsp. almond extract

Dash of ETHAN ALLEN
CREAMERY butter
1/2 c. water
1 tsp. vanilla

Mix all together in a bowl. Put in a double crust pie. Bake 1 hour in a medium oven.

"The Best in Cooking"
in

ESSEX CENTER



WOMAN'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE
ESSEX CENTER, VERMONT

CHRISTMAS FRUIT CAKE

Mrs. Frances Irish

1 c. boiling water
1/2 c. ETHAN ALLEN
CREAMERY butter
1 c. sugar
1 c. riced potatoes
1/2 c. molasses
1 ETHAN ALLEN
CREAMERY egg,
slightly beaten
1 tsp. each cinnamon
and nutmeg

1/2 tsp. each cloves and
allspice
1/2 tsp. each salt and baking
soda
1 tsp. baking powder
2 1/2 c. flour
1/2 c. each chopped nut
meats, raisins and dates
1/4 c. diced citron

Pour boiling water over butter and sugar. Stir in molasses, potato, eggs and lemon. Sift dry ingredients into another bowl. Sift 1/2 c. of the flour over the fruit and nut mixture. Add dry ingredients to first mixture then add fruit and nuts to batter. Pour into 2 qt. size container. Bake in slow oven for 1 1/2 hours.

Courtesy of Essex Center United Methodist Church WSCS

Powell's Place

"A GOOD PLACE TO EAT"

Rill & Marty Powell
Essex Center, Vt.



Powell's Place "Pig in the Blankets" was a popular
site at the Fair. They bought Vincent's Drive-In.

(Send recipes to any board member.)

In 1967 the Women's Group at the Methodist Church collected recipes and made a cookbook. Advertisements were also included in the cookbook, and one such advertisement was for the Powell's Place. Above is a photo of Vincent's Drive-In (before it became Powell's Place), taken in the mid 1950s by Evans Knapp. The current owners of Powell's Place have owned it since 1971.

A black cylindrical container, possibly a water filter or a small tank, with a lid and a vertical pipe extending from the top. It is positioned on a light-colored surface.

Do you have a picture that you think could stump the members? Or do you have a picture of something and do not know what on Earth it is? Send it in!

Please print

Name: _____

Mailing address: _____

City/Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Circle relevant Annual Membership Category or Lifetime:

Individual \$10

Family \$15

Senior (65 and older) \$5

Lifetime (individual, married, civil union) \$100

Yes! I would like to volunteer at the museum or other event.

Make checks payable to: Essex Community Historical Society, P.O. Box 8388,
Essex, Vermont 05451



Essex, VT 05451

P.O. Box 8388

Upcoming Events:

ECHS Christmas Tree Lighting:

Friday December 7, 2012 at 6:30

At the Essex Common.

Refreshments provided by the Girl Scouts, and the Founder's School Chorus will lead us in songs of the season!

Essex Town Meeting Re-Enactment:

March 2013.

