

**ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
 ESSEX TOWN-EST.1763 ESSEX JCT.-EST.1892 ESSEX COMM. HISTORICAL SOCIETY-EST.1991

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## THE ECHO

The Newsletter of the  
 Essex Community Historical Society  
 Essex and Essex Junction, Vermont  
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Fall 2013

Edited by Mildred "Molly" Brown  
 Essex Community Historical Society  
 P. O. Box 8388  
 Essex, VT 05451

E-mail address:

essexcommunityhistoricalsociety@myfairpoint.net

## Board Sees Changes

It's time for another newsletter. What a quick and wet summer we had here in Essex. Many gardens were under water and some did not get planted until the middle of July. I hope next year we see more summer weather.

Many members of our board have been busy working with the Town to help plan gatherings to celebrate our town's 250th birthday. New board member, Paula, has been working hard at putting together a brochure for the Harriet Powell Historical Museum. She is also working on writing grants for the Water Tower at Fort Ethan Allen. She quickly stepped up to the plate, offering her expertise to the board. Sherry Norton and Kathy Dodge are stepping down from the board. Both plan on continuing to be involved in helping us. Sherry has been a driving force to get our collection catalogued. Kathy has been in charge of getting volunteers to man the museum during the summer and early fall. We would like to give them a huge thank you for all of their hard work.

The museum was visited by tourists from all over the country this year. The word is out that we are here and people are calling and coming to do research on their ancestors. We can't always help, but it is great to see how far and wide our organization is reaching. Thank you also to all the volunteers who made it possible to keep our museum open. Without you, we would not have been able to show off our collection.

The Essex Community Historical purchased a brick at the Vermont Historical Society in memory of Harriet Powell and Ron Clapp.

Our annual meeting this year was "Susie Wilson, Her Life and Her Myth" delivered by past president Jerry Fox. Jerry, as usual, gave a very interesting talk about Susie Wilson. He brought her to life for those of us who attended.

Our annual Sing-A-Long and tree lighting will be held the first Friday in December, starting at the Essex Elementary School and walking down to the Town Common. We would like to thank Tom and Beth Tailor for all of their years of hosting the gathering down on the Common. They, too, stepped down this year.

Eva Clough, Co-President

Tim Jerman, Co-President



# ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2013-2014

Eva Clough, Co-President (14)  
42 Brigham Hill Road  
879-0849  
clough42@myfairpoint.net

Tim Jerman, Co-President (15)  
5 Sycamore Lane  
878-2972  
Vrunner56@msn.com

Barb Chapin (14)  
129 Chapin Road  
922-1230  
ebomalcolm@hotmail.com

Paula DeMichele, Vice Pres (16)  
somethinglikeastar@yahoo.com

Ann Gray, Treasurer (14)  
28 Rosewood Lane  
878-4088  
grayann8@aol.com

Jan Kilmer (14)  
15 Cabot Road  
878-2026  
ajctb@aol.com

Laurie Jordan, Secretary (16)  
259 River Road  
879-6467  
jjordan263@aol.com

Polly McEwing (15)  
5 Doubleday Lane  
879-6862  
pollywmce@aol.com

Jennifer Gilbert (15)  
3 Alder Lane  
871-5338  
jennifergilbert3@comcast.net

Thad Wolosinski (15)  
36 Chelsea Road  
879-0282  
afcollector@rocketmail.com

All addresses are Essex Junction, VT 05452

(denotes year of term expiration)

## The Museum Has Left the Building!

In an attempt to display more of our collection in the Essex community, and to help celebrate the Essex 250th anniversary, we have put some of our museum artifacts in places around town. Check out the Essex Free Library for current displays. We have also displayed advertising artifacts at the Brownell Library.



At Essex Free Library, we have displayed our Dolly Gram collection, and some of our school collection. Look for Dolly Grams again in March at the Brownell Library. Fiora's Bridal Shop graciously displayed one of our antique gowns.

If you have a suggestion for what you would like to see displayed around town from our collection, please let us know.

Enjoy seeing our history out and about in Essex!



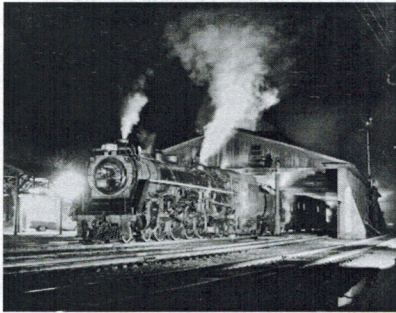


## Lay of the Lost Traveler: the Rest of the Story

### Part II

By Tim Jerman

Seen from a distance of over 125 years, the poem now seems both funny and cute. But back then, it was deemed a supreme insult in Essex Junction. Looking back many years later, long-time attorney and Essex Town Clerk Allen Martin said in a 1942 remembrance, "I am not going to read it, it has been quoted until it is threadbare. I was never enthusiastic over that piece of literature. It was written by a man who did not know how to travel. It is not classical, it is not verse, it has no humor, it has no music, it cannot even be followed on the piano." There are two scathing responses to Phelps in verse that survive; there may have been more penned at the time. One was by longtime Essex Junction Postmaster Alfred P. Lonergan, titled "Reply to the Lost Traveler."



#### Reply to the Lost Traveler

*Some years ago, a Senator—I believe Phelps was his name,*

*Sojourned in Essex Junction while waiting for a train,  
Inclined to be poetic to pass the time away,  
In rhyme real pathetic had quite a lot to say.*

*Condemning Essex Junction in English not so swell—  
In fact, he hoped its founders were shoveling coal in Hell.*

*The writer has sojourned here/ nigh on to thirty years—  
To Diagnose: the Senator had/ brains with wheels and gears*

*That needs oiling quite badly to open up his eyes  
To find he's erred quite sadly and should apologize.*

*The writer feels the Junction  
is a pleasant place to live;  
Its people and its founders the best that God could give;  
A haven that was founded in*

*our Green Mountain State*

*By pioneers that rounded among the good and great.*

*Those pioneers have come and gone—*

*I've stood beside their heirs.*

*They seemed to whisper, "Carry*

*on; waste not your time in tears."*

*Somehow, in kin they left behind, the spirit seems to last.*

*The Mill will never grind with the water that is past.*

*The trees will cease to bloom and flower/ unless you  
give them sap;*

*The mighty streams will lose their power unless you fill  
the gap.*

*Their names engraved on monuments,*

*their pens have ceased to function,*

*But they have written history/ for good old Essex Junction.*

*Their pens were swords at Gettysburg*

*Also at Valley Forge -*

*Their inks were drops of human blood/ that flowed down  
through the gorge;*

*That followed good old Sherman from Atlanta to the  
sea;*

*That made the good old USA a land of liberty./*

*The C.V. station stands erect where sat the famous  
Phelps/between the groans and yelps.*

*Because the gears were all gummed/ up that God put in  
his brains,*

*And clogged the art of reason*

*when it came to catching trains.*

*He couldn't tell if Montreal was way down south or  
north;*

*He didn't know if Santa Claus came 'round on July  
fourth;*

*And so he boarded the wrong train  
and had to hike it back—*

*In other words, our famous Phelps  
was clean way off track.*

*With saddened face and battered hat,  
on wooden bench the poet sat,*

*Trying to clear his muddled brains—all mixed up on  
C.V. trains.*

*With mighty pen—without compunction -  
assailed the Village of Essex Junction.*

*His poem sojourns as an  
aftermath, and these words are written in epitaph:*

*Here lies a poet whose muddled brain  
sent him to Hell on a C.V. train;*



Since he has passed the Great Divide, his mistakes  
and delays have multiplied.

His mighty pen has ceased to function; he  
shovels coal for lack of gumption,  
Not hide nor hair can he find there/"who first in-  
vented Essex Junction."



(Photo courtesy of Canadian National Railways)

The second is the "Lay of the One Who Got Left," attributed to Marcellus Bingham and his wife. Bingham was Essex Junction's lone attorney in the 1890s, a state representative, and one of the first Village Trustees in 1893. A prominent Republican, there is more than a touch of political scorn here as he ridiculed Phelps' failed nomination to the high court with another parody of Phelps' poem:

*The Lay of the One Who Got Left*  
On cushioned seat at "white House" sat  
A man of wit and foreign air,  
And 'neath his tall and glossy hat  
Gleamed eye that told of blank despair.  
From early morn till late at night Whether the day  
was foul or fair

He felt the touch of deadly blight,  
And cursed the fate that brought him there.  
Cried he, "Friends, fly the deadly place  
As you would plague or Peter Funk shun;

And I hope in hell  
Their souls may dwell  
Who interfered with Cleveland's function."

"Long days," quoth he, "while lingering  
Afar from England—happy spot!  
I've waited that delusive thing,  
That always coming, cometh not,  
Here have I met a sudden shock,  
I feel by man and God forsaken.  
A useless thing—a shattered wreck  
With failing strength and faith all shaken:  
The Irish put their veto on

Assailed my course without compunction;

And I hope in hell  
Their souls may dwell  
Who interfered with Cleveland's function."

"Judicial robes ne'er looked so fair,  
The bench so grand, the pay so great,  
Until they passed from being mine  
And I was left disconsolate.

The Brigadiers were all for me,  
And Sir Charles this, and Duke of that,  
Alas! My record would not do,  
And cruel Grover dropped me flat.  
It hurt my pride when thus I fell,  
And so I shout with greater unction:

I hope in hell  
Their souls may dwell  
Who interfered with Cleveland's function."  
"I'll hie me back to foreign shore  
Where knowledge reigns and culture's known  
Of these my griefs, I'll think no more,  
Or dwell on hopes that are now flown.  
At fair St. James the fest is spread,  
Victoria waits, the Prince is there;  
And while for me the wine runs red  
And clink of glasses fill the air,  
I'll shout! Avoid mistakes like mine  
As you would plague or Peter Funk shun,  
I say with redoubled unction  
And add without the least compunction  
I hope in hell/ Their souls may dwell  
Who interfered with Cleveland's function."  
(Thus writeth one from Essex Junction.)

In this author's judgment, the significance of this whole episode in Essex Junction history is that these "poems" are all well-written and entertaining a century later. They do highlight our history as an important rail intersection of the north/south Central Vermont RR and the east/west Burlington & Lamoille RR at the turn of the century, with four tracks (now one) and over 30 trains a day coming and going. No doubt, they did not always run on time, although there is no hard evidence that anyone in the village cemetery next door died while waiting for the train!

There is even some mystery about what actually happened to Phelps on his ill-fated travel day. One recollection says that it was mid-winter and he boarded a train in Burlington in a blizzard thinking he was headed to Boston but got on the eastbound to Cambridge Jct. Realizing his mistake, he got off in Essex Junction but was too late to check



in to the Central House next door, so he simply sat for hours in the cold station waiting for the morning train. That story seems unlikely as his poem clearly indicates that he boarded the wrong train after he had been waiting in Essex Junction and then had to wait again for the right one!

I hope you have enjoyed this long version of our "poetic history," and of our almost-very famous Vermonter, Edward J. Phelps. My guess is that these poems will still entertain 100 years from now. The old Burlington and Lamoille train Phelps took to get here from Burlington is long gone, but hopefully the Junction will still be a vital rail connection in the future. Phelps is buried with an impressive monument near Ethan Allen and Mary Fletcher in Burlington's Overlook Cemetery on Colchester Avenue.

(Take a short drive up Route 15 towards Cambridge to view all of the B & L stations which are still standing!)

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### SUSIE WILSON AT THE ANNUAL MEETING

Jerry Fox gave a very informative presentation about Susie Wilson: "Susie Wilson, Her Life and Her Myth" at our Annual Meeting at the Memorial Hall on October 1st. He explained how her farm's homestead had long been at the corner of Susie Wilson Road and Pearl Street, leading to the name for the area's trolley and bus stops. Her farm was convenient for the people at the Fort to get their food supplies from, and she had once been a cook for the soldiers.

Jerry's slides and stories revealed details he researched from the newspapers, court and police records, Susie's step-grandchildren and her family marriage and death certificates.



*Jerry shares at the annual meeting.*

He also gave us incite into her Irish immigration. It was a very enjoyable program for our members.



*Jerry showed his photo of Susie Wilson and her fourth husband, Fritz Krebser.*

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### A TOWERING CAMPAIGN

In August, the Essex Community Historical Society and the Town of Essex announced the establishment of a public-private partnership for the purpose of raising funds to restore the Fort Ethan Allen Stone Water Tower. Currently the tower, which needs extensive repair, is closed to the public.

The entire project, which will be done in stages over a six year period, is estimated to cost \$200,000. The initial stage will include cleaning the attic of the tower of accumulated pigeon waste, repairing or replacing sections of the tile roof and replacing the wood fascia running under the roof. Later stages will include replacement or mortar in the tower walls and stabilization of the stairway inside the tower.

The Town of Essex has set aside \$50,000 both for financing the initial stage and for leveraging matching funds from nonprofit organizations, banks and individual donors. The first grant applications are underway and will be submitted in 2014.

Raising the needed funds will be an ongoing challenge for the ECHS board. We welcome any suggestions from members for funding sources for the project. We also welcome donations in any amount for the preservation project. Members wishing to give individual donations may make them to the Essex Community Historical Society Tower Fund.



## DONATIONS

**Ann Yadow:** Ethan Allen Creamery bottles, 1940 Essex Junction High School yearbook, old family photos, and 1927 Flood and Fanny Allen books.

**Debbie Thompson:** panoramic photograph of Hubbel Falls, c. 1915.

**Wilma Benoit:** class pictures from 1952 and from her 1955 Eighth Grade Graduation.

**Bill and Phyllis Emdee:** Fort Ethan Allen napkin.

**Eva Clough:** postcards of Essex Junction and of Essex Square, photos of members moving the 1805 schoolhouse, and a photo of Harold Whitcomb's Weed Road farm.

**Laurie Jordan:** 2013 Essex photos for a 250th anniversary display, a chronological Civil War map, and two of her stories of growing up in Essex.

**Thad Wolosinski:** a two-handed cross cut saw, ice tongs, and a long wooden piked pole.

**Paula DeMichele:** 1830s Northern Ireland crystal coin dot pitcher.

**Westford Historical Society:** copy of John Saxe's poem "On the B. & L."

**Mary Cavanaugh:** 1886 Rann's *History of Chittenden County* book signed by her father (Dr. Crandall of Maple Street) and a 1976 Bicentennial edition of the Essex Junction High School Yearbook.

**Ann Gray:** Essex 200th Anniversary coin and rosters of Vermonters in various wars.

**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?*

## Meeting Jessie Powell

By Eva Clough

In August, I picked up the telephone at home and got the surprise of my life. The young lady identified herself as Jessie Powell. Granddaughter of Harriet Farnsworth Powell. Jessie was going to be in the area, and wanted to see where her grandmother had lived, where she was buried, and to visit Harriet's dream: the museum.

I picked her up in Burlington. It was dusk, so we decided to go and visit the homestead first. We pulled in to the big parking lot in front of the red barn. Things had definitely changed; gone was the old gray barn and white house. The gentleman and his wife who had recently purchased the property came over to talk to us. Jessie did some reminiscing of what things looked like in her memory.

From there, we went to the cemetery, and she got out and walked around the place where her grandmother is buried. Then we went to the museum. I took her picture standing by the sign, then we went inside. She was so enthralled with the museum! I showed her the picture of her grandmother and the dedication to Harriet, the door's picture showing her grandmother's barn doors, the corner with lots of memorabilia from Harriet's house. She sat in her grandmother's chair, and I took a picture for her and then we looked around at the rest of the museum. What a good visit with Jessie! Her grandmother would be so proud of the delightful woman she has become.





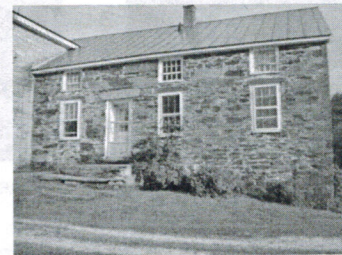
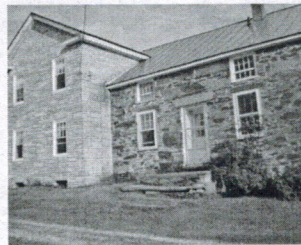
## THE HOUSE ON BLISS STREET

By Kathy Dodge

Timothy Bliss, Esq. built his stone house in 1787 on what is now Weed Road in Essex Town. At the time, Weed Road was called Bliss Street as not only Timothy lived and farmed there, but several of his family members also; Amos, Samuel, and Elias, for three.

Bliss, who was a leader both in the town of Essex and later in the fledging state of Vermont, built a sturdy two story stone structure with hand-hewn beams, numerous rooms, and small-paned windows, some of which still show the waviness of old glass. The Browns River bordered the northeast side of the property, undoubtedly flooding in the spring, assuring fertile fields for corn, and good hay for cattle and horses. The river and the farmland also provided ample stone for a house for his wife, Zerviah, and their nine children, plus supplying a barn's foundation.

The house that Bliss built still stands, fronted by the large post and beam addition built in the early 1800s and enclosed in the 1950s in perma stone by the then owner, Henry Moulton. The farm has known several owners over the years in addition to Moulton: Ransom, Place, Dupres, Packard. We know the house today as the home of Larry and Donna Holmes who purchased the farm in 1978 from the Packard family, including over 140 acres on both sides of the river, and 70 head of cattle. The Holmes farmed until 1998 when they sold the cows, and in 1999 divided the property, keeping 4 1/2 acres of land surrounding the house and bordering the river. In 2002, they remodeled much of the house to become the Stoneholm Country Inn. It was during the renovation that they became interested in knowing more about the history of their house.



"I didn't realize how much history there is in this house until we started doing the research," Donna said. "There is evidence that the family lived in the basement [of the original stone house] because there are six little rooms on a dirt floor down there with little brick partitions. We're pretty sure the stone came up from the river. Big, huge, heavy stones. Upstairs the beams were unbelievable, so we know horses [or possibly oxen?] must have been involved in lifting the beams up." The Holmes have recently taken down the original barn with its slate roof and stalls for horses.

When the Packard family owned the farm, they cut through the solid wall between the stone house and the front addition to make additional rooms upstairs. The Holmes later renovated to provide an upstairs bathroom for their inn guests.

"The reason we know how wide the beams in the floor were was because we had to actually tear up the floor and figure out where we were going to put the plumbing through," Donna explained. The stone house is notable today for its deep doorway entrance, deep window sills, wide floorboards, and thick beams.

Through their research, Donna and Larry learned that the addition, which is their primary living quarters, was built in the early 1800s, as homes at that time were built with post and beam construction. Walls of the house were lathe and plaster, which went through to the exterior.

Donna explained further. "The bricks found in the kitchen walls between the plaster and the outside walls were soft bricks, and we believe used for insulation in that era."



The Federal Style house was built with two large first floor rooms and a central hallway with a staircase leading to a second floor hallway off of which are two large bedrooms, and one smaller room. It is assumed that Bliss, whose dates are 1745 to 1817, also built the addition.

In the late 1970s, Doris Ransom Muenier visited Donna and Larry and remembered that as a young girl on the farm in the early 1900s, the current side porch was not part of the house. Instead, there was an access door into the stone house cellar where a horse-drawn wagon could pull up with wood to be unloaded for the large wood-burning furnace.

The original gray stone house was painted red at some point, which is what we see today. Until recently, the first floor of the stone house has served as a rental apartment.

If you had been a guest at Stoneholm Inn before it closed in 2010, you might have mingled with other guests from England, South Africa, New York, Vermont, and enjoyed Donna's blueberry muffins with your morning coffee in the spacious kitchen. You might have looked out the kitchen windows and seen the occasional car driving by the Inn on Weed Road. Or maybe in your mind's eye, you would have seen Timothy Bliss, Esq. riding his horse down Bliss Street, off to do some important business for the Town of Essex or for the new State of Vermont.



Donna and Larry



### **Stoneholm Blueberry Muffins**

1 egg	2 cups flour	1 cup blueberries
1 cup milk	1/4 cup sugar	sugar/cinnamon combo
1/4 cup vegetable oil	3 tsp baking soda	

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Spray muffin pan (makes 6 large Texas-size or 12 regular). Beat egg with a fork, add milk, oil and sugar. Add flour and baking soda. Stir to mix (not smooth) and add blueberries. Fill muffin pan and sprinkle sugar/cinnamon on top. Bake for 20—25 minutes.

### **Resources:**

Donna and Larry Holmes  
Frank Bent's book on the History of Essex.  
Tim Jerman's article on Timothy Bliss, ECHO 2012.



### ESSEX 250th BIRTHDAY DISPLAY

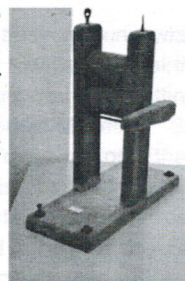
The Champlain Valley Exposition helped Essex to celebrate our 250th Anniversary in the State Building during fair week. Visitors stopped by the Essex 250th pictorial display to view the town and village changes in stations, businesses, offices, and even the fair over the years. People shared memories and identified relatives, such as in the photo of the R. O. Mudgett Hardware Store on Main Street.



Barbara Mudgett-Russell points to the owner, Ralph Mudgett, her late husband's grandfather, standing behind the counter.

### WHAT IS IT?

People at the fair's ECHS 250th exhibit guessed what this could have been: among other things, a pasta machine? a wool carding machine? a laundry device? "Folks who say pasta machine are partly right: it's some kind of rolling mill or wringer," responded Laurie LaBar. The chief curator of history and decorative arts of the Maine State Museum had searched her catalogues. She explained, "Maine and Vermont...are full of homemade farm equipment that got used for everything from baling hay to doing laundry." This photo has traveled to several antique shops and museums with still only a guess. It's in our museum, but PLEASE let us know if you remember one on a farm!



*Did you guess what the photo was in the previous edition of the ECHO newsletter?*

### ESSEX COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please print

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Circle relevant Annual Membership Category or Lifetime:

Individual \$10

Family \$15

Senior (60 and older) \$5

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

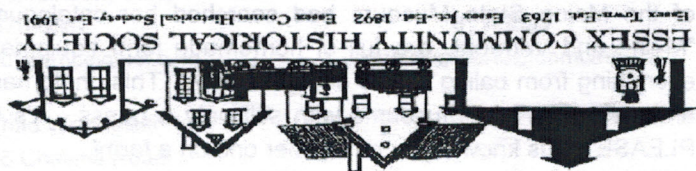
\_\_\_\_ Yes! I would like to volunteer at the museum or other event.

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



Essex, VT 05451

P.O. Box 8388



#### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**A CIVIL WAR CHRISTMAS: November 23rd at 2:00.** Marietta Phifer and her great-great niece, Karen Mayer, will present a program about what it was like at Christmas time during the Civil War. Program will be at the Brownell Library in Essex Junction on Lincoln Street in the Kolvoord Room. For more information, call Ann Gray.

**ECHS ANNUAL TREE LIGHTING and SING-A-LONG: December 6th at 6:30 at the Commons.** We will walk down from EES at 6:15 to sing carols with Founders' Memorial School Chorus and return to EES for cookie refreshments from the Girl Scouts.

