



Williston Historical Society Bulletin

Volume 46, Number 2

October 2019

“Every individual is an historical figure.”

Founded 1974

S. & J. Burroughs, Editors

WHS Officers

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Vice President – Meghan Cope
Secretary – Marlene Price
Treasurer – Jon Stokes
Archivist – Adriene Katz

Directors: Steve Perkins
Cameron Clark
Adriene Katz, Collections Manager/Archivist
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Save the Dates

Friday November 8 – 7:00 PM

Old Brick Church Music Series

Williston Historical Society is Music concert host & beneficiary

November 9 – 2:00 PM

(note time change from 10:30AM)

Annual Meeting

Dorothy Alling Memorial Library

Program by Cameron Clark

Please update your email address and phone number

If you have not recently updated your email address with the WHS, please do so by sending your current email address to Peter Callas at peter.callas@uvm.edu

I Remember...

Please share if you have a memory of growing up or living in Williston,
Send your memory to Jeneva Burroughs
momdad.burroughs@gmail.com.
or mail to 81 Peterson Ln. Williston, VT 05495

Report from the President

Dear Williston Historical Society Members,

We are soon to close out a productive year for the Society. Programs were held on a variety of topics to appreciative audiences. These included the presentation of the culmination of an exciting partnership with students in the 4th grade at Williston Central School titled "The Williston Landscape Change Project". We also heard about Reed Brown's Journey when WHS member and author, Dick Allen, presented to the Chittenden County Historical Society; The Precarious Lives of Children in Poverty in Early 20th Century Vermont and from the author of "Out of the Attic", letters home during the Civil War from two Vermont men. There is one more program scheduled to round out this year. I invite you join us on November 9 from 2:00 to 3:30 PM for a fascinating look at discoveries from the attic of the Chittenden/Clark farm and hear about the history of this Williston homestead.

A workday was held this spring to clean up the Stovepipe Schoolhouse on the town Green. The schoolhouse was open for visitors on July fourth with a display of the moving and restoration project as well as artifacts set up in the manner of a typical one room schoolhouse setting.

The society welcomed UVM student intern Bella Frederico who worked throughout the summer to produce an interactive historic site map of sites in Williston. You will be notified by email when this map is available for public use.

I met with Melinda Scott of the Williston Planning Office to discuss placement of interpretive signage about historic places around Williston village. This will be a project in which WHS will partner with the town providing historic pictures and text. The project is in its very early stages so watch for more information in the next year.

Finally, be sure to come out to the Old Brick Church Music Series on November 8 at 7:00 to listen to "Beg, Steal or Borrow" a bluegrass group who have been dubbed "Triple Crown Bluegrass Band". The concert host and beneficiary is The Williston Historical Society.

We are always looking for new members as well as folks to help in small ways, such as making cookies for the November concert. Contact us at willistonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com if you are interested in being on the board or helping in any way.

Be sure to follow and like us on Facebook!

Brenda Perkins, President

Notes of Interest

Seven Days has a short book review of "Reed Brown's 1841 Journey." WHS is mentioned as holder of the journal. Check it out at the following:

<https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/page-32-short-takes-on-five-vermont-books/Content?oid=28110589>

Williston Historical Society Needs your help!

WHS is growing and would like **YOU** to take part in the fun!!

Are committees and meetings not your thing? We have many ways that you can contribute to WHS on a one time or “once in awhile” basis.

Contact us at willistonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com and let us know what your interests are and how you can help.

- Hospitality (arrange for and set up light refreshments during our programs)
- Ice Cream Social July 3rd (help pick strawberries, make sauces, or scoop ice cream)
- Publications (write or find articles for our newsletter published biannually)
- Oral History (interviewing and/or transcribing recorded history)
- Archive work (working under the leadership of our archivist, help with collection management, cataloging, accessioning, etc.)
- Exhibits (working with WHS board members to arrange exhibits for July 4th and other events)
- Membership (Assist in maintaining membership rolls and recruiting new members)
- Funding (canvas local businesses and organizations for contributions)
- Like us on Facebook
- Contribute a favorite memory about growing up or living in Williston for inclusion in our “I Remember...” section of the newsletter

Charles Brown, The Whaler

Charles L. F. Brown: The Williston Whaleman, Part 2

By Richard H. Allen

Williston native Charles L. F. Brown left two surviving journals of his 19th century adventures on the high seas serving on several whale ships. He wrote about the many lands he visited, the people he worked with, and the challenges of hard labor involved in tracking, killing, and rendering the whales for oil and baleen. The New Bedford Whaling Museum holds one of his journals and, with the financial support of the Williston Historical Society board, a copy was secured for transcription.

What follows is an excerpt from the journal Brown kept while serving as a steward on the *Pocahontas* from Tisbury, Massachusetts from 1844 to 1846. A steward acted as the “captain’s personal servant. He kept the captain and mates’ cabins in order and waited on the captain and mates at mealtimes in the main cabin. He was in charge of the cook and responsible for keeping track of the stocks of food and other supplies aboard the ship.” “Laura Jernegan: Girl on a Whaleship:” <http://www.girlonawhaleship.org/index.html>)

"There she blows, there she blows," the men at masthead sing out....

"Where away?" says the skipper.

"Ahead sir."

"Steer the ship straight me hearties" (says the Capt.) "and let us have a haul out of that school of whales."

Our vessel is soon close on to the monsters, our boats are lowered, and pursuing them swiftly.

I did not go on the boats but remained one of the shipkeepers on board. I went to the mast head to see the sport of capturing a whale.

The boats are nearly on them whales. The boatsteerer stands up, takes his harpoon and in a moment darts it in to the whale. And another boat fastens to another whale and now for sport, that is, for me who is safe on board the vessel. But them poor fellows in the boats, I have no doubt they are frightened for as much as it is agreeable and healthy for such constitution of man.

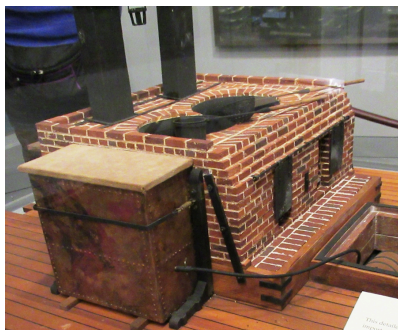
"There one of them spouts of blood. Look steward, don't you see it?" our shipkeeper says to me.

Sure enough, he did spout thick red blood, and then I think my eyes stuck out a little well as Ebenezer's. Only think of the idea of transplanting a green Vermonter from his own hills and placing him in the middle of a great ocean. And then to see such a monster throwing blood 30 feet high. Only it is enough to animate all the practical feelings that man is blessed with. I was enjoying the sport first rate. The whale was making near to the ship. I had a fair view of him.

All at once the skipper sang out, "Haul back the main yard as quick as possible Cooper." It was done in a minute and for what reason I know not, but it was done as the whale was close under our bow and I can assure I did not like the idea of so near a neighbor, for I have often read in a school book how the ship Essex of Nantucket was sunk by a whale, and not half as large as this one was, but my anxiety soon was at an end. He turned and went a short distance from the vessel. Then he lay as still as death for a few minutes.

It was evident that he must die soon. Yes, the monster of the deep must yield himself to man, who if they only knew their power, could destroy the largest vessels in a short time, and a boat and a crew would be a mere atom for them. But all things are so harmonious with the will of our Creator, that feeble man has power to capture one of the greatest monsters living. This poor whale has fought for his life, but to no avail. The harpoon and lance have done its work effectually. A faint stream of blood now oozes from his spout hole. His strength is failing. His whole frame quivers. And all at once he starts with the speed of lightning and goes about a mile. Then he takes a circle around (which almost all whales do when they are dying) with his mouth open and his eyes fixed and "turns fin out" and the conflict is over.

The other whale was captured about the same way. We soon had them both along side, having captured two large sperm whales, and had them along side in about 3 hours from the time we lowered for them. All bustle and confusion on board for men have got to cut them in and try them out.



A model of a tryworks, the device installed on board a whaling ship to reduce whale blubber to oil. Photo by Richard Allen, courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

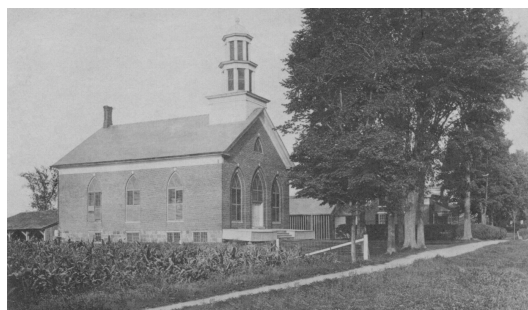
What followed after securing a whale to the side of the vessel was intense messy work to get the whale cut up and the blubber processed into oil. The *Pocahontas* had tryworks on board, a furnace to render the blubber into oil. The brick structure held several iron pots and was first fired by wood, and later by some remains of the whale which had burnable oil residue in it. There was a reservoir of water underneath to protect the wooden frame of the ship from the heat of the fires. The oil was stored in barrels below deck. By the end of the voyage the *Pocahontas* had harvested 1,100 barrels of sperm oil, 950 barrels of whale oil, and 9,000 pounds of whalebone (baleen).



A TALE OF TWO BELFRIES

By Mark Hutchins

A note from Mark : As I am constantly researching the Old Brick Church and its architectural history, I recently discovered a significant association between the church and another similar one nearby. Your members might enjoy my conclusions about the two.



Old Brick Church – Williston



Essex Congregational Church – Essex Center

The Old Brick Church in Williston remarkably preserves on the exterior its original appearance as constructed in 1831 and as dedicated in January of 1832. Except for the obvious new addition at the rear, or north end of the building, and the conversion of the window to a new exit door at the southwest corner of the basement, the building would be readily recognizable to its original congregation nearly two hundred years ago.

Described by a Burlington Free Press reporter who attended that winter dedication in 1832 as in "the Gothic Style", in fact the only Gothic architectural element visible then and now were the arched windows with their beautiful arched tops. No other element of the style appears to have ever been incorporated into the exterior design.

This is particularly baffling when one considers the two-tiered dome capped belfry. Although the present belfry is a very faithful reproduction of the original which was destroyed several years ago by lightning, there has long been speculation that this might not be the original belfry and that there may have once been a different one with a more appropriate Gothic styling. Some suggestions have been made that during the major remodel which totally changed the interior appearance of the church in 1860, the belfry may have been changed as well. The interior of 1832 may have indeed been a more simple and perhaps Gothic inspired look, but it was removed and later to have a decidedly classic appearance, with entablatures, pilasters, cornices, etc. which we see today.

It is probably at this 1860 remodeling that the painted white band was applied on the brick at the original cornice to make the exterior more resemble a classic entablature without incurring the expense of an actual wooden construction.

It needs to be kept in mind that 1860 was the same year the new Universalist Church was built directly across the street (now the Town Offices) and which was a very obvious classic composition. There seems to have been an attempt by the Congregationalists to emulate the classic look as much as they could.

Could this have included replacing a Gothic belfry with the two-tiered one we see today?

Until recently my opinion remained open. Given the amount of money spent by the Society in remodeling the interior, it might have been a part of the change to include a new, more classic styled belfry. A new bell, in fact, was not installed until nearly twenty years later.

I have spent many years researching the church and its various elements but have never found any evidence of a previous belfry. Yet I, too, like many others have speculated the style of the belfry is not quite in harmony with the Gothic windows.

Recently evidence became available which seems to provide significant evidence, however circumstantial, that in fact the belfry design is original to the 1832 structure.

I happened, as I often do, to be surfing the internet one day not long ago trying to find buildings with this unusual two-tiered octagonal belfry. In fact, I've been trying to find something similar for years. There is a somewhat similar church in the Mohawk Valley of New York but it is only one tier.

Quite by accident I stumbled on a photograph, though in very poor quality, of a brick church topped by a nearly identical belfry as the Old Brick Church. It appeared startlingly so.

What made this discovery all the more exciting was the fact that it was on a church in Essex Center only four or so miles from the Brick Church. I had missed it originally because it is now long gone, although the building still stands in Essex and is now the Library.

After contacting the local Essex Historical Society, I was kindly provided with another photo showing the Essex Congregational Church, with the distinctive two-tiered, dome and ball topped belfry clearly visible.

How could two such buildings exist with such a distinctive belfry so close to each other geographically? Was there a relationship?

The Essex brick congregational church was constructed only four years AFTER the Williston church as a result of fire destroying their original wooden building. There can be little doubt that members of both congregations knew each other and that members of the Essex congregation might have attended Williston's church while building their own. And it seems also quite likely that someone or perhaps members of the Essex building committee admired Williston's belfry and incorporated the design into their own new building. There is little possibility that this design is coincidental.

The important fact is that the Essex church copied the design of the Williston church as it existed only four years after construction and well before the 1860 remodel. The only difference in the design of the Essex church is that the lower tier is raised slightly on an octagonal base.

The Essex church belfry was removed in the late 1800's due to rot, the Historical Society reports and today there is no trace of it on the Library.

Although this is not conclusive evidence that the two belfries were related, the fact that they are nearly identical, only a few miles apart, of the same period of construction, it is certainly probable they are indeed related, and much like the Federated Church being a copy of the Burlington Baptist Church, it is certain people of those days were not at all adverse to copying architecture they admired.

From the Williston Historical Society Bulletin, April 1976

Did You Know That:

Of all the houses in the central village district on Route 2, from the Catholic Church to Allen Brook, only six are post-1900? The majority of the 35 are at least 100 years old and many are older.

The little humped bridges in the village were built with a "mint of money that old man Root brought back from the California Gold Rush.

Route 2 was originally an Indian trail and was chartered as the Winooski Turnpike in 1805.

Williston town roads were established in 1787.

East Cemetery was established in 1787.

The Town Common, located at the corner of Route 2 and Maple Lane actually did have a "public meeting house." According to the 1913 History of Williston, the meeting house was erected in 1796. The building was 50x57 ft. and "built in the style of ye olden tyme with galleries on three sides, square pews, and a lofty pulpit perched on top of a shaft. There was no means of heating it except for old fashioned foot stoves."

Williston had seven taverns at one time or another. There were two at Taft Corners – Calvin Morse on the southwest corner and Isaac French. The Winslow Tavern (Webster House on Route 2 near Maple Lane). The Eagle Tavern at the site of the Federated Church. Thomas Chittenden operated a tavern on his farm on the South end of Governor Chittenden Rd.; and Deacon David Talcott operated the first known tavern on Oak Hill Rd. at the corner of Sunset Hill Rd. Linus Atwater's tavern was located in the village about 1913, near the corner of Tower Lane and Rout 2.

There were three creameries: the Village Creamery on North Williston Rd., a little north of the Korner Quik Stop, one on Oak Hill, and one in North Williston, near the RR crossing.

There were at least five sawmills in Williston – one located on the Winooski River, two on Allen Brook, and one on Muddy Brook operated by the Miller family. In 1860 a steam sawmill was erected at North Williston by Hiram Fay.

There were at least two grist mills – one run by the Miller family on Muddy Brook and another in North Williston.

Ten to thirty distilleries were in operation in the town at one time or another.

President Chester A. Arthur played on the streets of Williston as a boy. His father was a minister and headmaster of Williston Academy, located where the Armory now stands.

...compiled by Jean Batelle & Mary Bushey, House Survey Committee, 1976.