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History Center: Th. & Fr. 2-4, Sat. 11-3

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Newsletter compiled by:

Lee Ha

Brattleboro History Center Opens On Main Street

It has long been said that Brattleboro needs a place for people to come and learn about the origins and development of our town. The Brattleboro History Center is a new project of the Brattleboro Historical Society to do just that.

Located at the Masonic Center on 196 Main Street, the Brattleboro History Center features an ever-changing gallery of displays of interesting historical objects and images from the Brattleboro Historical Society and members of the community.

The Brattleboro History Center is designed as a compliment to the BHS Research Room. Located on the third floor of the Municipal building, the Research Room remains the source of printed collections and other paper-based materials. The History Center offers space to exhibit items from the BHS collection that the public has rarely seen.

Each month, new themes will be explored, allowing the community to see Brattleboro from many unique angles including manufacturing, entertainment, transportation, agriculture, and of course, Brattleboro personalities. Visitors can expect to see paintings, signs, toys, books, furniture, tools, clothing, posters, maps, and other historical objects in the coming year.

Community Collections are an important part of the plan, and space is available for local individuals, businesses,

and organizations to share their own historical items with the public. If you have a collection of Brattleboro-related artifacts, please get in touch.

The History Center will feature special events, workshops, lectures, and activities for history explorers of all ages, and the Brattleboro Historical Society encourages the community to think of it as a resource for all to utilize.



Our Brattleboro History Center, 196 Main Street, Preview Opening 6/7/13. (Photo: Lee Ha)

You can volunteer and share your love of Brattleboro history with visitors to the Brattleboro History Center. Call today to find out how to become a gallery guide, help with exhibit preparation, plan activities and events, or share your special expertise.

Come by the new Brattleboro History Center for a visit on Thursday and Fridays from 2-4 pm and Saturdays from 11-3 pm. Call 802-258-4957 for the latest information about hours and events. ♡

—Chris Grotke

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BHS Receives Two Grants

BHS is pleased to report that the Brattleboro History Center has been awarded grants totaling \$1,500 from the Crosby-Gannett Fund (\$1,000) and Dunham-Mason Fund (\$500) of the Vermont Community Foundation. Added to the generous donations from individuals and businesses reported elsewhere in this issue, the money helps pay for exhibit walls, display cases, signage, and other necessary expenses to set up the new facility.

The Crosby Foundation was founded in December 1951 by Charles R. Crosby, a native of Brattleboro, to help serve community needs in the broader Brattleboro area. Although he came from a prominent local family, Crosby spent most of his working life in New York City in the investment business. In 2009 the foundation assets were turned over to the Vermont Community Foundation, which established the Crosby Fund, later adding the name Gannett to honor Senator Robert T. Gannett who had guided the Crosby Founda-

tion as Secretary-Treasurer for more than 50 years.

Cousins John L. Dunham and George Dunham Mason were partners in Dunham Brothers Shoe Co., a national shoe wholesaler founded by their ancestors in 1885. It was long one of Brattleboro's biggest businesses, located at first on Main Street and later at the Cotton Mill. The company was sold to Bass Co. in 1969. Both men were very active in the community and in charitable organizations. They started the Dunham-Mason Foundation in 1954 and the assets were turned over to VCF in 2009, establishing the Dunham-Mason Fund.

Both funds support projects that contribute to the betterment and vitality of the Brattleboro area, that rely mainly on local financial support, and that focus on innovation, capital improvements, and historical renovation/preservation. To us, that sounds just like the Brattleboro History Center! Thank you, Crosby-Gannett and Dunham-Mason Funds.

-Barbara George

Cleaning Whetstone Brook, 1911 style

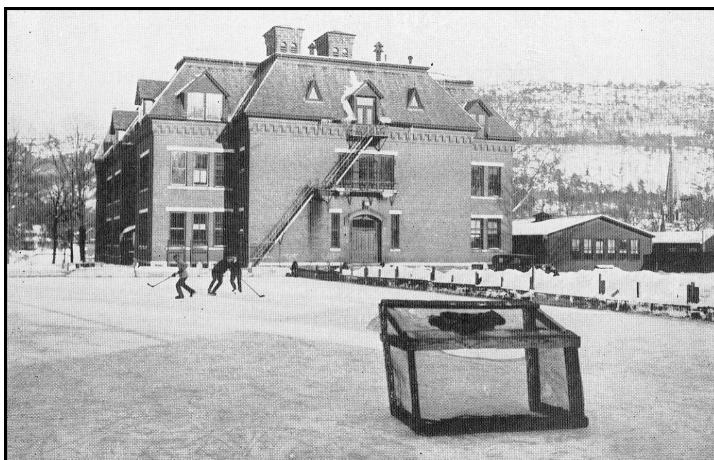
WHETSTONE BROOK CLEANED.

Deplorable Conditions Improved Through Efforts of Selectman Galvin—Accumulation of Debris Removed.

Through the efforts of Selectman John Galvin the bed of Whetstone brook, from the dam at Vinton's paper mill to the dam near the site of the old mill on Bridge street, is receiving this week a scouring such as it has not received in many years. Workmen removed several boards from each end of the lower dam, near the old mill ruins Tuesday afternoon and shoveled away great quantities of oozy mud. A large accumulation of old newspapers, bottles and other refuse was hoisted over the dam and the place began to take on a better appearance. A hose was attached to a high pressure hydrant Wednesday morning and with two men on the nozzle the work of washing out the bed of the brook from the Vinton dam toward the river was begun. The brook has a rock bed between the Emerson building and the Armory building and the men washed the rock almost clean of its thick covering of mud, which probably was more than two feet deep. Old pieces of wood, bottles, bundles of papers and rubbish of all kinds were moved down the stream toward the holes made in the dam and into the river. It probably will take the workmen the rest of this week to clean the place up as the bed of the brook is uneven and it will not be easy to get rid of the thick coating of mud that has lodged there.

(Vt.. Phoenix Excerpt, August 11, 1911)

Then and Now:



Brattleboro High School, back lot turned into a hockey rink. See page 12 for photo and information regarding the annex to the right of the school. (Photo: L.R. Brown early 1930s)



Brattleboro Municipal Center today, hockey area is a parking lot. Annex was removed long ago to make room for more parking. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2013)

In the Research Room: Jim Powers' "Best Photos at the Brattleboro Reformer, 1/1/89 – 3/15/96"

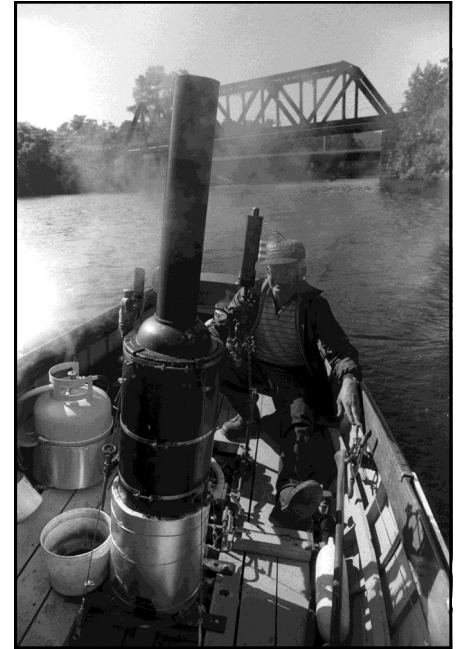
The art of photojournalism is truly becoming a historical notion. With the recent layoffs of 28 photographers from the Chicago Sun-Times, including Pulitzer Prize winner John H. White, the future of the profession is uncertain. In this age of online "crowd-sourced" media and ubiquitous high-quality mobile phone cameras, visual journalistic content is experiencing growing pains.

These are the thoughts that accompany me as I digitally scan a collection of negatives left behind by Jim Powers, a former Brattleboro Reformer photographer. The negatives are a selection of his favorite images, taken between 1989 and 1996. While these years may not seem particularly historical for some, I have found them to be an interesting window into a time often considered to be too recent to be thoroughly archived. Especially for a

recent Brattleboro transplant like myself, Powers' photographs offer some context to Southern Vermont's current sense of place. On black and white film, Powers documented sporting events, town fairs, accidents, agricultural and industrial labor, local figures, leisure activities, and much more. Some of the images selected were simply picturesque Vermont tableaux. Others utilized clever photographic techniques. All of them lend insight to the local people and community culture. ♪

-Ryan Stratton

(Ryan is an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer with In-Sight Photography Project on Flat Street. He volunteers for 2 hours a week at BHS perusing and digitizing the thousands of negatives and slides in our collection, soon to be published on our website. Thank you, Ryan!)



*Steamboat on the Connecticut River
(Photo: Jim Powers, 10/1/1989)*



Spilled truckload of watermelon (Photo: Jim Powers, 8/17/93)



Vermont Bread Company. (Photo: Jim Powers, approximately 1990)

2013 Membership

Thank you to everyone who has kept current with their membership this year. If you have not sent your 2013 membership, please remember to send it in soon. It not only helps us preserve Brattleboro's rich history and assures that you will continue to receive this newsletter, but now serves as your admission to the new History Center. Thanks!

-Lee Ha

Secrets in Brattleboro's History

(The following article was sent to us by BHS member Mary Ann Hooper. Articles regarding Brattleboro history are always welcome for our newsletters.)

I am researching my great grandparents' train trip from Brattleboro to San Francisco in 1871, using their diaries which are still in the family. They were Charles and Fannie Crosby Rice. Fannie (pictured below), was the daughter of Edward Crosby, a successful and prominent grain merchant who set up E. Crosby Milling Company in Brattleboro (and built Crosby Block on Main Street). Charles was offered a partnership in the business when he married Fannie. Charles and Fannie's son Howard Rice started



Fannie Crosby Rice, BHS member Mary Ann Hooper's Great-grandmother. (Photo BHS archives.)

the Brattleboro Daily Reformer in 1913. Howard's daughter Marion Rice Hooper is my mother. (See BHS Newsletter No. 32, September 2007 on file in BHS Research Room.)

On the two-week train journey, Charles and Fannie stopped in Chicago and Omaha and looked up old friends they'd known in Brattleboro. They don't provide any detail of these friends, so I have been trying to find

out more about who these people were. I have discovered someone else whose place in Brattleboro history seems to have been air-brushed out of the historical accounts!

The couple arrived in Omaha in October, 1871, and visited Mr. and Mrs. Truman Buck. I looked for a Brattleboro connection with Truman Buck via Brattleboro records (using the internet) and found nothing. Maybe the connection was through his wife, but I didn't have her name. I then looked for records of Truman Buck in Omaha and found an article from the Omaha Daily Bee, dated 9 years after the Rice visit: - "Half a Million! The Defaulting Banker Who Took It Arrested in Omaha!"

Further online searching produced this shocking headline from the New York Times on 22 September, 1880. *"SILAS M. WAITE ARRESTED. THE ABSCONDING PRESIDENT OF A BRATTLEBORO BANK CAPTURED IN OMAHA. A decided sensation was created in Omaha today by the arrest of Silas M. Waite, the absconding President of the First National Bank of Brattleboro, Vt., whose defalcation amounts to \$450,000. He was arrested at the house of his brother-in-law, Truman Buck, a well-known and respected citizen..."*

The Omaha Bee article reported that Mrs. Buck and Mrs. Waite were sisters - so this was the link to Brattleboro. What a peculiar way to find out.

I was then curious about the Brattleboro banker, who I'd never heard of, so I checked online copies of the Vermont Phoenix. The first article goes on at length about the shock of local residents that such a prominent and respected member of the community has been arrested. Silas M. Waite wasn't just the President of the First National Bank of Brattleboro, he was involved in many Brattleboro businesses and good works. He was associated

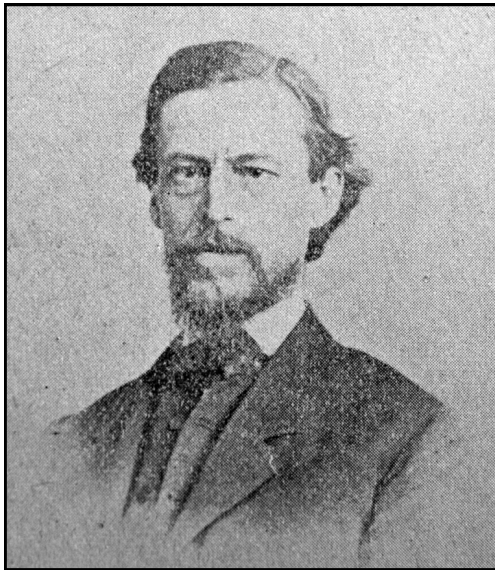
with Riley Burdett, who had left Estey Organ Company to set up his own organ-building firm in Chicago in 1868. (My great grandparents visited the Burdetts directly after the Chicago Fire which had destroyed the business.) I'm surprised how much hearsay information they printed in those days. One informant suggested to the Phoenix that Waite had lost money invested in Burdett's business when it was destroyed and this may have contributed to the problems of his bank. In due course he was convicted and sent to prison. When he was released, he and his family moved to Omaha, where he died.

So why is it that I have never heard of him? We know about Jim Fisk, the robber baron, and Madame Sherri, the eccentric and risqué lady who built a castle in West Chesterfield. What about this embezzler who ruined a local bank and its investors and who figured in national newspapers, such as the New York Times? \$450,000 was a lot of money in those days.

I decided to look in the most comprehensive account of Brattleboro that I know of, the Annals of Brattleboro 1681 - 1895, compiled and edited by Mary R. Cabot, published in 1921. My mother had a copy and always referred me to it for pre-20th century Brattleboro information. The Annals are now uploaded on the internet.

He's there, one of many biographical sketches. He is introduced as a "man of a remarkable grasp of business affairs, of wide general information and of unusual facility in all mathematical operations. He was also a man of great public spirit, whose services in connection with every movement for the advancement of the town's life gave him a position of influence and leadership which he held for more than thirty years."

During that time, he was employed by or set up a long list of Brat-



Silas Waite (Photo from BHS obituary archives.)

tleboro businesses, he was elected a town representative, he was on the boards and committees of numerous worthy organisations, and in 1870, he was visited by a crowd of residents with the Brattleboro Band to show "their appreciation of his efforts in forwarding enterprises for the promotion of the prosperity and welfare of the village, and especially for his energy and perseverance in completing the Connecticut River bridge in the face of serious diffi-

culties." In 1878 he rebuilt the toll bridge and made it free.

And then we read: "Mr. Waite's public career terminated with the failure of his bank in 1881, under circumstances which need not be considered here."

Wow! Why didn't the Annals mention the embezzlement and the prison term? What happened? He doesn't seem to have benefited materially from the money. One Phoenix article implies that he was a control freak and kept such tight control over bank

affairs that no one else knew what was happening. Perhaps his "remarkable grasp of business affairs" was overtaken by an even stronger need to be seen as a successful and philanthropic citizen.

I haven't the time to follow this up, but it would be a good project for someone else to find out more about Silas Waite - and why Mary Cabot felt obliged to cover up his fall from grace. ♪ -Mary Ann Hooper

Newspapers Galore

Brattleboro's rich history is documented in many forms, one of the most fascinating being newspapers. Our town has had quite a few publications, only a few made it longer than the initial run of several years.

BHS is fortunate to have editions of more than 20 different newspapers ranging in years from 1797 (Federal Galaxy) to 1998 (Town Crier). The 1800s were a thriving time for newspaper hopefuls, some of the papers during that time were The Brattleboro Eagle (1853-1854), Brattleboro Messenger (1824, 1827), Brattleboro Times (1861), Windham County Democrat (1838-'40, 1846) and the Record and Farmer (1870-'79). Of course the papers most remembered are the Vermont Phoenix (1834-1955) and Brattleboro (Daily) Reformer (1906-present). The Vermont Phoenix has been completely digitized by the Library of Congress and is accessible to the public via the internet, but if you would like to pick up an actual piece of history, we invite you to come to the Research Room and read the issues of the papers we have. There are also several volumes of our papers in the new History Center on Main Street if you want to stop in and see the displays. ♪

REFORMER EXTRA!

BRATTLEBORO, VT., JUNE 16, 1880.

Bank Smash!

THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF BRATTLEBORO RUINED,

BY THE DEFALCATION OF COL. SILAS M. WAITE, ITS PRESIDENT, WHO HAS RUN AWAY.

THE LOSS VARIOUSLY ESTIMATED AT FROM \$100,000 TO \$500,000.

FORGERY AND WHAT OTHER CRIMES.

A BIG CRACK IN THE UPPER

the bank. A few moments' examination satisfied them that something was wrong, and the deeper they probed, the blacker things looked. They found a note bearing the signature of C. J. Amidon, which that gentleman himself immediately declared a forgery. The signature of the late C. C. Waite, of New York, on considerable other paper was likewise pronounced a forgery. It was also found that a large number of notes which have been shown to the directors at the late "investigations" as among the assets of the bank, are missing, and the supposition is that they were forgeries and that Waite destroyed them before clearing out. The directors, after investigating long enough yesterday, to be satisfied that their institution was ruined, took an adjournment to 10 o'clock to-day, when they will

is that he has gone off and committed suicide. But this is merely a supposition with no evidence whatever to support it, so far as we know. Still another theory is held by a few who retain their faith in Waite's fertility of resources, and believe that he only left to raise money in some way to ease up present difficulties, and will yet return and face the music with his old-time grit.

As to the extent of the loss, nothing more than the merest guessing in the dark can yet be done. There is some paper against home parties that is good, if it does not prove to be forged like that against Amidon. But the great bulk of the notes are against parties in the west, or in distant cities, and from what is already known it is naturally expected that this will mainly prove to be forged. In fact the investiga-

stition. He was a poor man when appointed cashier but very soon became prominent in various business enterprises. He has been largely interested in the manufacture of carriages, of cottage organs, here and at Chicago; he owns all the stock of the Brattleboro Gas Company, the Hinsdale stock company, and is an extensive owner of real estate. He has been prominent in railroad circles as a director in the Vermont Valley, Connecticut River, and formerly of the West River railroad. One enterprise he was pushing up to the day he left town was the proposed railroad from Brattleboro to Hinsdale. From about 1862 to 1867 he controlled both the politics and the business of Brattleboro. He represented the town in the legislature and came near being nominated by a Republican State

Brattleboro Reformer reports the details of Silas M. Waite's criminal activity, while Mary Cabot all but ignore the news. (BHS Newspaper Archives.)

Brattleboro History Center Opens!

For months, BHS volunteers searched items in storage in several places around Brattleboro. Moving, cleaning and choosing what to display, many people worked tirelessly to set up the Preview of Brattleboro's first History Center. This is a year round, ever-changing display with summer hours Thursdays and Fridays 2-4, and Saturdays 11-3, and Gallery Walks until 8. (Photos: Lee Ha, 2013)

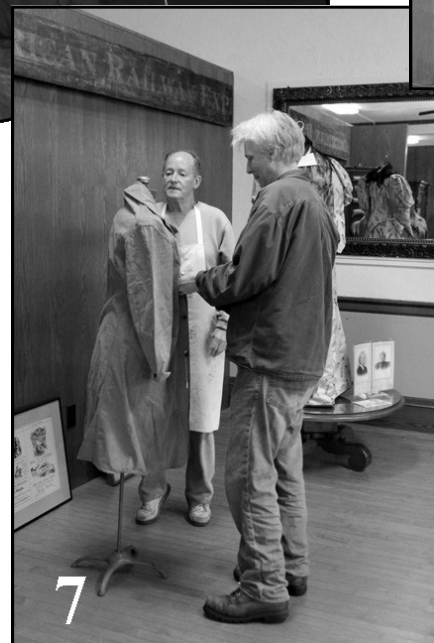




Photo Key

Discoveries :

1. Dianne Shapiro with inventory list in hand
2. Corn Sheller revealed
3. Patti Griffin, Karen Davis inspecting boxes of bottles
4. Barbara George, Karen Davis glad to find a display case
5. Richard Langlois showing 2 impressive swords
6. Kevin O'Connor carrying a table to its new storage room
7. Richard Langlois, Chris Grotke setting up duster coat

Opening Day:

8. Visitors with Elizabeth McCollum and Chip Cummings
9. Impressive Estey Sign over 5 feet tall
10. Local pharmacy bottle display
11. Karen Davis, Chip Cummings with 'for sale' items
12. Valley Fair Display

Mother's Old House

My grandparents, Carmi and Effie Bancroft, lived in a small house at the back of the driveway between the Baptist Church and the Masonic Lodge on Main Street. (See photo on page 9) The house was built in the 1870s and was used as a parsonage for many years. In 1901 my grandfather, who was employed at the Estey Organ Company, became the church custodian and the family lived there until 1913 when my grandmother passed away. Their three children, Raymond,

Marguerite and Mildred, spent their early childhood playing in the driveway in front of the house.

The Masonic Lodge building was built in 1905 as a home for Dr. F.H.O'Connor and was purchased by the Masons in 1910. Just north of the lodge was the old library, the Charles Cune home and the Charles F. Thompson home. The Cune house was moved to the back area near "Mother's Old House" and the library and Thompson House were eventually

torn down to make room for the U.S Post Office and parking lot as we know today. In 1936 both the Cune house and "Mother's Old House" were demolished as they had deteriorated and could no longer be used as rentals. In the final days of "Mother's Old House" the front part was used as a WPA canning kitchen. ♪

—Harriet Ives



Family and friends of Harriet Ives' relatives. Masonic Temple to left, Baptist Church to right. (Photo: photographer unknown, early 1900s, Harriet Ives' personal collection.)



Family and friends of Harriet Ives' relatives. Mother in the middle. Baptist Church and Masonic Temple behind them. (Photo: photographer unknown, early 1900s, Harriet Ives' personal collection.)



Carmi and Effie Bancroft house at the end of the driveway, behind the Masonic building on Main Street. (Photo: Lewis R. Brown, prior to 1936)

Gifts From You!

Since our last newsletter the following items have been received by the Society: A "With Interest" booklet was received from Nancy Smith of New York. Several pictures, postcards and a broadside were given by Richard Michelman. Edna Fletcher donated a fan from the Auditorium depicting the show "Abie's Irish Rose." Photos taken from the air of Orchard Street homes were given by Wendy Randall and Frank Davis. A CD recording of the "Brattleboro Waltz" was given by Bob Henry and Peter Amidon. Mary Lou Buchanan gave a Common Ground Dessert Cookbook and Dianne Shapiro donated a Rudyard Kipling scrapbook done by her husband Howard Shapiro. Thanks to all! ♡ -Harriet Ives



A special thanks to Brattleboro Memorial Hospital for their generous donation of 4 much needed computers. These computers are in use at the new History Center as well as in the Research Room. Thank you BMH, these have been very helpful as we continue to digitize our photos, catalog our artifacts and introduce the public to BHS extensive collection!

BHS Appeal 2013

The Board of Trustees would like to thank everyone who has donated so generously to the 2013 appeal. The New History Center is taking shape and with your help will be the Heritage Center Brattleboro has needed for many years. 2013 appeal donors as of 7/11/13 are as follows:

Valerie Abrahamsen, Stephen Baker, Wayne and Barbara Blake, Michael Bosworth, Brown and Roberts Hardware, Ronda Burgess, Burrows Specialized Sports, Jerry Carbone and Kathleen Maisto, Pamela Cersosimo, John Chard, Wells Cunningham, Doris Dearborn, James Douglas, Robert and Booie Fagelson, Elizabeth and John Fitts, Patricia Fitzgerald, Bob and Barbara George, A. Whitney Germon, Rick Hashagen, Don and Joanne Hayward, Charles and Mary Henderson, Helene and Robert Henry, John Hooper, Mary Ide, Laurance Leonard, Rebecca and Gene Lepkoff, Donald and Nancy Long, Paul Love and Hollace Bowen, Mary McGill, Ann Parkhurst, Joanne and David Patenaude, Carolyn Peck, Faith Pepe, Stephen Pike, Louise Pike, Barbara Pofcher, Robert and Sen Pen Pu, Mark Richards, Peter and Susan Sherlock, Ernest and Elizabeth Simmons, Russell and Doris Stephens, Alice and Donald Stockwell, Myrtle Stowell, Chris and Suzanne Tabone, Robert Tortolani and 3 anonymous donors. Our generous contributors have donated a total of \$2,955 thus far. Thank you.

Do You Recognize this House?



Brattleboro Historical Society recently acquired photos from the late John Houpis collection. Some photos are not identified and this is one of them which we could use your help in identifying. This photo is at least 100 years old, trees have grown or been cut down, and there very well might be other homes next to this one. Does this home look familiar? If so, please let us know. We have a file of unknown photos, if you are interested in trying to identify some of them, come into the Research Room for a look.. (Photo: C.L. Howe, late 1800s)

Did you know?



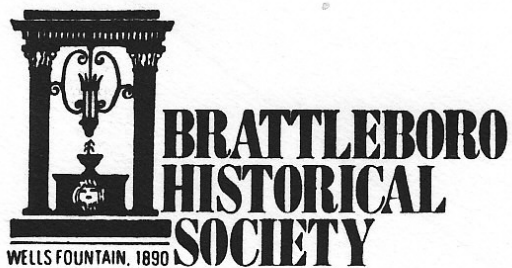
This three-story blue, brick building on School Street was a Methodist church many years ago. The Methodists began in a small district school house on Canal street in the 1830s but by the 1840s they had built the large brick building across from the Estey estate (now Moore Court.) By 1872 they devised another location and this church building was listed for sale. The buyer converted the building to six apartments which remain today. ♪ - Harriet Ives (Photo: Lee Ha, 2013)

Visiting the Historical Society, Research Room or History Center?

Our office and paper-based research materials are currently located on the third floor of the Municipal Center, an historical Brattleboro landmark on its own. We have hundreds of postcards, thousands of photographs, volumes of books, newspapers, maps, diaries, Estey Organ material and even a Victorian Trading

Card collection. Come in with your questions and projects, volunteers are available to help you find the information for which you are searching. This part of our collection will remain at the Municipal Center at this time. We are open Thursdays from 2-4 and Saturdays from 10-12, or by appointment.

Our new History Center, located at 196 Main Street, is now open on a regular basis, Thursdays and Fridays from 2-4 and Saturdays from 11-3. Please stop by for a trip down memory lane with our ever changing artifact display, 19th century newspapers to read, digital slide show and so much more! ♪



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Brattleboro, VT 05301

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This building was the annex to Brattleboro High School. It served as overflow classrooms, for agriculture classes and orchestra classes! Today this area is a parking lot, the near side of the building would be facing what is now the back entrance to the Brooks Memorial Library. See 'Then and Now' photos on page 2 for exact location. Changes far beyond this are due for the near future as Brattleboro prepares to enlarge the Police Station.. (Photo: B. Crown, early 1930s)