

Contact Information

Email:

histsoc@sover.net

Address:

Brattleboro Historical Society
230 Main Street, #301
Brattleboro, Vermont
05301-2880

Telephone:

802-258-4957

Hours:

Research Room: 230 Main St.
Th. 2-4, Sat. 10-12

History Center and Museum

196 Main Street

Check our website for hours

Trustees 2018-2019

President: Joe Rivers

Vice-President: John Carnahan

Secretary: Carol Farrington

Treasurer: Gary Goodemote

Karen Davis

Barbara George

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Newsletter compiled by:

Lee Ha

Contents

Hermits.....	1,3
River Garden Feb. 26.....	1
Annual Meeting, New Trustees...	2
Donations from You.....	2
Neighborhoods: Forest Square	4,5
Did You Know?.....	5
Signature Quilt.....	5
Scanning Project, Businesses...	6,7
Bits of History, Stained Glass...	8,9
Then and Now.....	9
BHS Near and Far.....	10,11
History Center Update.....	11
Project Donors Update.....	11
Skating on High Street.....	12

Hermits Find Solace on Chesterfield Mt.

No doubt there have been lonely souls over the years who found peace living on the mountain, but only a few have been remembered long enough to hold a place Brattleboro's history books.

One such man was Sidney LeRoy Holt. Born in Weston, VT in 1845, he was mustered into service in the Civil War, in Brattleboro, in 1862. He immediately spent the winter doing the dangerous picket duty at Bull Run. Soon after the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg, Holt was sent north and discharged, only to reenlist in 1864. Because of his good penmanship, his job now involved writing the muster rolls, payroll and other necessary records. He was finally discharged in 1865, quite proud of his service.

Sidney married and had 6 children, but the family never lived in Brattleboro. In 1879 he was first admitted to the Vermont Asylum for the Insane, being brought here from his home Londonderry. Upon leaving the Asylum, he vowed he would never return. In 1884, unbeknownst to him, he was again being taken to the Asylum, but a struggle broke out and he brandished a pistol when he realized where

he going. The short ruckus ended quickly with Sidney yielding to the sheriff. This time he was declared insane.

Mr. Holt stayed in Brattleboro for most of his life and over the years he was known to sell shoes and second-hand goods around town. He occasionally roomed on Elliot Street and at one point lived in Esteyville.

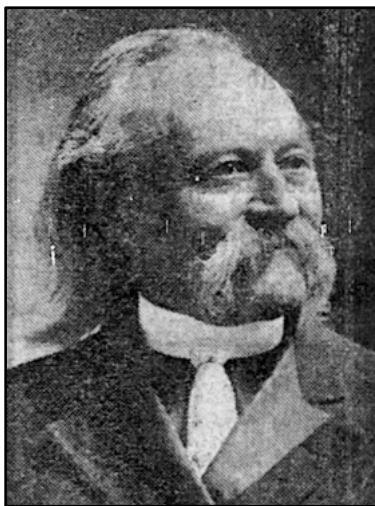
He was a long-winded religious orator and often attended different churches in town. Sidney sounded-off in front of church groups or gave extended talks—especially at the Methodist

Church prayer groups. On one occasion he preached of his freedom of speech and religion as he pulled an

American flag from his pocket. This discourse was sparked by a reprimand he received from church officials and the chief of police about his tirades!

Sidney was admitted to the Retreat many times over the years for his entire adult life and eventually found the life of recluse more comforting where he could play his violin and write poetry alone. So he built a shack in a gully at the base of Mt. Wantastiquet (Chesterfield Mountain) directly across the river from Centre

See **Hermits** page 3



Sidney LeRoy Holt (Photo: Brattleboro Reformer, Date Unknown)

Join Us: River Garden, February 26th!

If you didn't have a chance to make the trip to Montpelier to visit our "Defining Decades-1870-1920" display at Vermont History Museum, you can see the whole thing in the River Garden on February 26th from 4-7pm. Volunteers and trustees will be there to answer questions and refreshments will be available. If you can't make that, you can see a good portion of our hard work in the River Garden for the month of February.

Annual Meeting, Slide Program, and New Trustees

Our Annual Meeting took place on November 17th at the Brattleboro History Center and Museum in the Masonic Lodge on Main Street. A short meeting with attending BHS members began our annual gathering, followed by a slideshow presentation highlighting the exhibit, "Brattleboro: Defining Decades 1870 to 1920" and newly scanned digital images from our extensive photograph collection. An enjoyable dialogue ensued with the audience and refreshments were served following the presentation.

We are very pleased to welcome two new BHS Trustees, Carol Farrington and Gary Goodemote.



Carol Douglas Farrington, new BHS trustee, volunteer and life-long local resident. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)

Carol has been volunteering in the Research Room for a few years now and graciously accepted her nomination to the board. Carol grew up in Brattleboro and has always been interested in local history. Her mother, Marguerite Douglas, was a founding member of the Brattleboro Historical Society. Carol began tracing her own family history at a young age. Her aunt, Helen Haskell, was the family genealogist, Carol has picked up the torch and worked to organize boxes of family history into a cohesive whole. She enjoys the mysteries that enfold when tracing questions of the past and has seen how her family history is entwined with Brattleboro's. Her volunteer work and local expertise are greatly appreciated. She is our Board of Trustees new Secretary.

In 1977 Gary Goodemote moved to Brattleboro from upstate New York. For many years he has been involved in civic affairs; serving on various town committees, boards and service organizations. He is also the owner of "Friends of the Sun" on Putney Road. Gary grew up with an appreciation for local history and a valuable understanding of place in the community. Both of his parents were very active in public affairs and were strong role models.

Gary's business background and love of community are great assets for our board and is serving as



Gary Goodemote, new BHS trustee, business owner and volunteer. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)

our Treasurer. We welcome him to the Brattleboro Historical Society.

-Joe Rivers

For the month of February a good portion of our "Defining Decades: 1870-1920"

Montpelier Exhibit will be on display at the River Garden. If you have a chance, take a look. We will have the entire exhibit, refreshments and much more including items for sale on February 26 from 4-7 at the River Garden. Many of the volunteers and board members will be available to meet and talk with. Come downtown, we'd love to see you!

Donations From You!

Since our last newsletter we have received many pictures of our area. Annie Coughlin donated several postcards and a copy of the first annual Winter Carnival booklet. More

postcards and some early photos came from Ronald and JoAnn Tier. A numerous collection of old family and town photos came from the Tasker family collection. Mark Rivers gave

some marksmanship trophies for rifle, shotgun and revolver skill. Mark Richards donated a large collection of framed Brattleboro photographs and ephemera. Many thanks to all!

Hermits *continued from page 1*

Congregational Church.

Although he had friends in Brattleboro, not everyone took a fancy to his shack across the river. One such citizen wrote a letter to the Vermont Phoenix during a time when the town was looking for a place to build the police lockup. The writer suggested using Sidney Holt's "villa" for it would save the town some taxes and inmates could bathe in the river.

One winter Sidney went north to sell his poetry, but when he returned his shack had been destroyed and his trunk, full of his beloved Civil War memorabilia had been stolen.



Sidney LeRoy Holt toward the end of his life. (Photo: BHS Photo Collection, Benjamin Crown, c.1919)

Due to his declining health and rheumatism in his later years, he was in and out of both Brattleboro Memorial and Melrose Hospitals. In September 1918 he was admitted to the Retreat for the last time and there succumbed to apoplexy (stroke) two years later, on December 13, 1920.

* * *

The mountain gully home was not only Sidney Holt's. 100 years prior, a memorable couple, Sukie and Jimmie Barnes, also found life easier across the

river for part of their lives. They were such an intriguing part of this town that they were even represented in the Brattleboro Pageant of 1912.

Jimmie was first employed locally in the late 1700s by John W. Blake, Esquire, who owned the Blake Mansion and was a substantial Brattleboro landowner. Jimmie was a devoted farmhand of Mr. Blake's ("Squar Blake" as Jimmie called him) for many years.

Jimmie's amazing imagination led him to be a great storyteller, which appealed to the townsfolk. He told many stories of his voyage from England to the U.S. One involved being in a huge cask thrown overboard in a storm, washing up on shore and his reaching out and grabbing an oxen's tail, thus breaking free from the cask. He occasionally told the story with Sukie in the cask with him.

It was generally believed, however, that Jimmie met his wife Sukie in John Holbrook's Store, later the American House. Jimmie boasted of buying his wife from her husband for a mug of flip (beer and rum with sugar and spices, heated with a red hot poker).

It is unknown whether Jimmie and Sukie were ever actually married, however they had several children. One daughter left town when she married, another daughter, Olive, born in 1801, was described as 'idiotic,' and remained with Sukie and Jimmie throughout her life.

Besides being Blake's farmhand, Jimmie tended other gardens around town, and he also dug graves "up on the hill." He dug some of the first graves in Prospect Hill Cemetery.

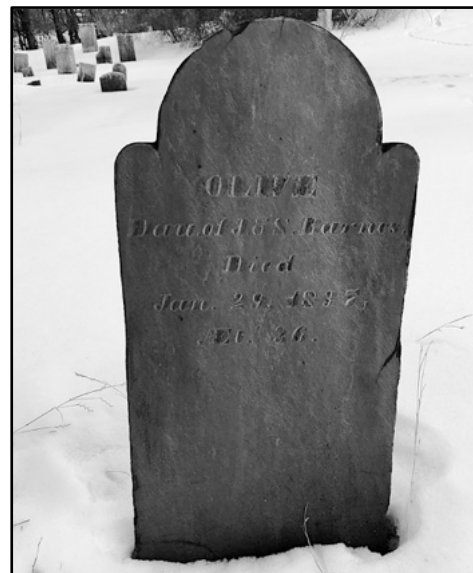
Sukie made doormats and mops and also told fortunes. Some said she made good money, others said she read fortunes simply for some green tea.

Around the time of John Blake's death in 1818, Sukie and Jimmie moved across the river with Olive to the base of Chesterfield Mountain (Mt. Wantastiquet) in the

same gully Sidney Holt would live much later. They built themselves a shack and made a large garden. Both continued their income producing ventures.

Jimmie's outlandish stories never stopped, he told of killing a rattlesnake on the mountain which measured 16 axe-helves or about 40 feet long.

Their shack was an ever growing eyesore until Colonel Paul Chase and high school teacher Mr. L. G. McKean, rebuilt it for them. Sadly, several years later in 1837, a fire broke out and though Sukie and Jimmie survived, their daughter succumbed to injuries from the fire. Olive was 36 years old. She is buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery and it's unknown if her father dug her grave.



Olive Barnes' gravestone, Prospect Hill Cemetery (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)

The aging couple were brought back to Brattleboro by Colonel Chase and well-cared for until their deaths, Sukie passed in 1839 in Chesterfield NH, it's unknown when Jimmie died.

One wonders who the next person will be to occupy the Mt. Wantastiquet gully and make it into Brattleboro's history books!

-Lee Ha

Neighborhoods: Forest Square

The area of Brattleboro bounded by Western Avenue, Cedar Street (formerly known as North Street), Spruce Street, and Myrtle Street is known as Forest Square and includes Laurel, Olive, and Sycamore streets, and Ginkgo Lane. Cedar Street extended only to the corner of Myrtle Street, and did not connect to Linden Street as it does today.

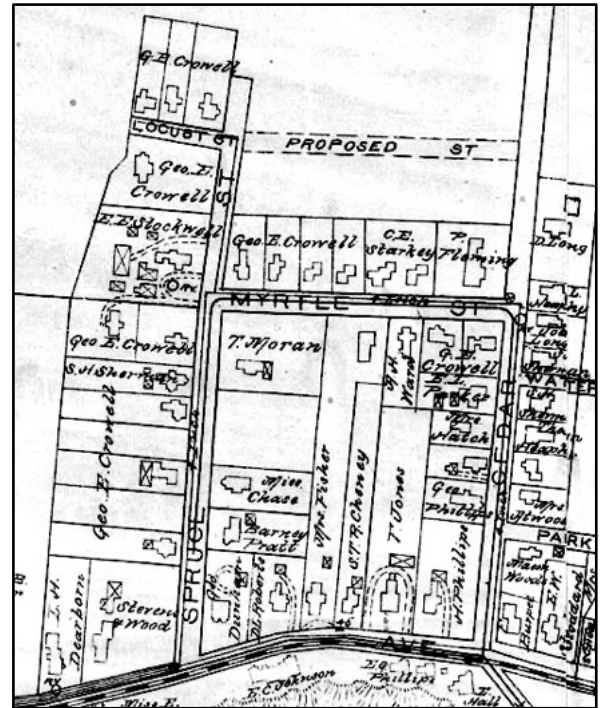
This area was described in the July 31, 1868 Vermont Phoenix as consisting of 32 building lots arranged on either side of the three streets, many of them long and narrow, which would allow for a house to be built on the front of the lot with garden space in the rear. (see 1869 map right)

Even though the Vermont Phoenix of the above date states that I. K. Allen was the first man to erect a house on the Square, a study of the Brattleboro Assessors Office records indicates that there were houses in the area as early as 1840 (currently numbered 71 and 92 Cedar.) More buildings were constructed in 1845 (currently numbered 36 Spruce and 83

Cedar). The neighborhood grew by only 6 houses before 1868, but between 1869 & 1900 twenty-eight more homes were built.

Looking at a current Brattleboro tax map shows that in some cases the houses were close together, especially on Cedar Street, where much of the east side was completed with a few exceptions up to the current number 83. Spruce Street was not so populous but the north side of Myrtle Street was as it appears today with only one vacant lot. By 1895, George E. Crowell owned 13 of the original 32 lots and had built 11 houses, including his own which was located at what was then 6 Spruce Street.

A September 5, 1873 Vermont Phoenix article says: "One of the most desirable portions of our village for residences is in the vicinity of what is



1895 map of Forest Square from D.L. Miller 1895 map of Brattleboro.



Forest Square from Highland Park. Cedar Street is in the foreground (Photo: BHS Photo Collection, Date unknown)

known as Forest Square. The street on the east side of the square, called North street (now Cedar street), will soon be opened through to Asylum street (now Linden street), affording many good building sites and a pleasant drive. That on the west side of the square, which has been named Spruce street, has been extended north to the line of the Goodhue property, and will ultimately bound another square. Several fine building lots in this vicinity have lately been sold to parties intending to build. At the present rate of progress, but a few years will elapse before Forest square will become a thickly populated neighborhood."

By 1876 the area was rapidly becoming one of the most popular in the village with the houses being "of a handsome and substantial class." In 1881 street lamps were added, and the Brattleboro Gas Company included Forest Square in their expansion of the gas lines as they pushed further west. One item of note was George E.

Crowell who, with Sidney H. Sherman laid 20 rods, or about 330 feet, of concrete sidewalks in front of their houses on the west side of Spruce Street; and proposed to continue it the entire length of the street. The residents benefited from Mr. Crowell's presence as he helped establish the reservoirs to provide water for fire protection and for drinking water. He also built several of the houses.

Over the years, this area was part of the route for local parades

which marched through town, circled Forest Square, then continued to their final destination. Especially noted in the Vermont Phoenix were the 1880 Republican celebration of the election of James Garfield; the 1884 Democratic election of Grover Cleveland; and the first Vermont Wheel Club bicycle parade in 1894 led by notes of a bugle warning people of the arrival of the "silent steeds".

-Carol Farrington

Did You Know?

Much of Brattleboro was loosely divided into neighborhoods or areas, and many of the old names have nearly disappeared from memory. Most know of Esteyville and now we know Forest Square, but do you know of others? Where was the Patch? Was Centerville downtown? Where was the Fort Dummer area? And what about Swedeville? In future issues we'll be exploring all these and more!

Signature Quilts as Historical Records

Signature or friendship quilts were popular beginning around the 1830s. These specialized quilts were a collaboration of several or more people who put their effort into each square of fabric to be incorporated into a quilt, signing and usually dating their work. Most often women gathered where they then stitched the squares together at a so-called quilting. The result was a

useful memory which, if cared for properly, could be loved and enjoyed for years to come. Special occasions were marked by the gift of the quilt and would also be made for people recovering from an illness.

We are so happy to accept, as a donation, one such amazing local quilt, from Lydia Bredemeier is mostly a family quilt. Of the signed squares, 10

are Brattleboro residents and all are local. The owner who donated this made a family tree to identify each person, where possible, and, together with the quilt itself, shows the historical value of such a work of art. We are thrilled to add this fabulous quilt and family genealogy to our artifact collection!

-Lee Ha



Above: Family and friends signature quilt donated to BHS by Lydia Bredemeier



Right: One example of the many squares "Your Cousin Jennie E. Goodenough Brattleboro, VT Sept. 1878."



Television Vermont: currently a massage establishment near the corner of Canal Street and Clark Avenue.

**Our Scan
Brattleboro Busi
Scan
BHS Brattle
Negativ**



Toney Brothers Supperette, currently a restaurant near the corner of Canal and Birge Streets.



Calvin W. Cole Goodyear Tire distributor, currently Code 3 Products and Napa Auto Parts. Near Canal and Clark Streets intersection.

**Next issue will
negatives from**

ning Project: inesses in the 1950s ned from eboro Reformer e Collection



Carroll Drugs, currently Boomerang. "Modern Laundry" alleyway eventually became a small, one story building housing Lyon Travel, today houses the Christian Science Reading Room. Elliot Street



*Canal Street Laundry, on
 eets.*

ll feature the 1960s



R.C. Fisher Oil Company, currently Spofford Bodywerks and Kresge's Alignment Service, near the corner of Canal and Birge Streets.

Bits of History in our Midst

Our Bits of History column takes us back to 1885. Seldom seen from the inside, a striking piece of colorful antique art!

Brattleboro has a history of moving and saving old houses, structures, and monuments. The most spectacular such move can still be remembered by older residents when St. Michaels Episcopal Church was moved in 1953 from downtown on Main Street where Key Bank is now located (2019) to its present site at the corner of Putney Road and Bradley Avenue. Monuments moved and saved include the Recording Angel, also known as the Snow Angel, sculpted in marble by Larkin Mead, which was moved from All Souls Unitarian Church to Brooks Memorial Library. Another sculpture moved and saved was the bronze Spirit of Life by Daniel Chester French from Plaza Park, also to the Library.

Less well known is a round stained glass window that was moved and saved sometime after 1922 from the Universalist Church on Canal Street, later the Grange Hall and now (2019) the Agape Chapel.

The original Universalist church building was constructed circa 1850-51 with expansion and changes to the facade in 1871 and remodeled again in 1885. One of the changes to the facade in 1885 was installation of a round stained glass window in the center above the front entrance with the inscription "Gift of the Murray Club." (See photo pg. 9) There are scant church records for the local Murray Club, but it appears to have



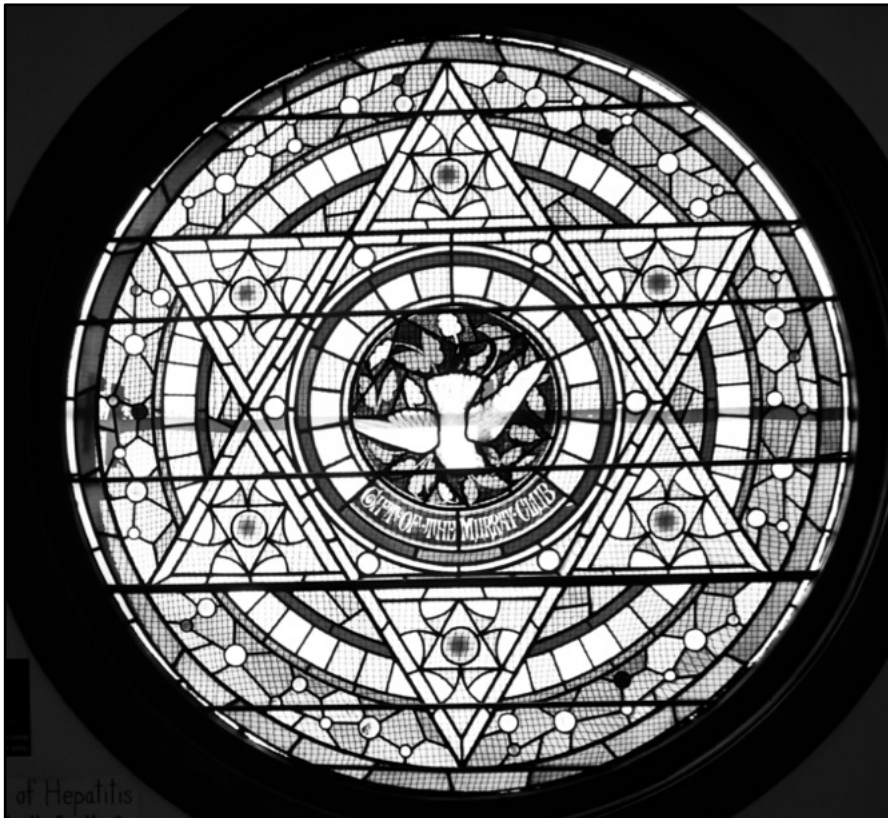
Round stained glass window in the former All Souls Parish House on Grove Street. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2018)

been organized in the 1880s for young people and its aim was to raise money for different activities of the church. It is assumed to have been named for John Murray, an early and perhaps earliest Universalist minister in the United States.

In 1921 the local Unitarian Congregational Society of Brattleboro invited the First Universalist Society to unite in forming a common liberal church known today as All Souls Unitarian-Universalist Church. The Canal Street building was sold to the Grange, and arrangements were made for removal of church fixtures and memorial windows. The round Murray Club window was moved and installed in the west wall of the 1913 All Souls Parish House on Grove Street behind the church. The window remains saved today even after sale of the Parish House building in 1972 to the Kristensen and Cummings law firm and later to other private owners. (see photo above)

In the meantime, one can still see the round window frame above the front door of the old Universalist church building on Canal Street (see following page) a silent reminder of the historic stained glass window that was moved and saved.

-John Carnahan



Stained glass window on a sunny winter's day. Peace dove in the center with "Gift of Murray Club" in beautiful font below. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)



Universalist Church, Canal Street, note stained glass circular window (Photo: BHS Photo Collection, c. 1890)



Agape Chapel, Canal Street, note cross in circular inset in place of stained glass window. Another noted change is the removal of the steeple. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2017)

Then and Now



Then: Organ Street facing west. Note that Organ Street continued easterly down the hill behind the Daly Shoe building to Canal Street. This photo was donated to us with detailed information regarding homeowners and location. (Photo: BHS Photo Collection, date unknown)



Now: Organ Street facing west. Much has remained unchanged except another house was built to the west of the house in the foreground, and only a foot path remains of the east part of Organ Street down the hill behind the Daly Shoe Building to Canal Street. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2018)

BHS Leaves its Mark Near and Far Thanks to Media

The articles now appearing weekly in the Reformer are a collaborative effort by many. Eight years ago Brattleboro Area Middle School rekindled interest in local history by visiting the archives of the Brattleboro Historical Society. About five years ago students from BAMS, and members of the historical society, began preparing radio segments for WKVT entitled "This Week in Brattleboro History." These radio shows continue today and have grown into separate podcasts found on the Soundcloud.com channel <https://soundcloud.com/bratthistoricalsoc>. There are over 180 of these local history podcasts archived on the internet. The scripts from those podcasts and radio shows are now being edited by the historical society to create these articles. The information comes from historical society archives that have been compiled for over 35 years, and from current research completed by BAMS students and BHS Trustees and volunteers.

Over 170 years ago many doctors bled their patients when they didn't feel well and prescribed medicines that contained mercury and other poisonous metals. About half of the patients who had surgery died from infections.

In the 1840's one in five children born alive did not live to see their 1st birthday. The average life expectancy was less than 40 years.

It was in this medical uncertainty that Dr. Robert Wesselhoeft arrived in Brattleboro and established a "water cure" treatment facility on Elliot Street. The "water cure" aimed to work with nature to heal the body instead of attacking the body with man-made medicines. Fresh air, exercise, healthy foods, community and lots of water were the cornerstones of the Brattleboro Hydropathic Institution, locally known as the Wesselhoeft Water Cure.

The "water cure" promoted a healthy lifestyle of diet and exercise. It

was thought that many of the ailments facing people of the mid-1800's stemmed from poor medical treatments that caused more harm than cure. Dr. Wesselhoeft thought pure water applied inside and outside of a patient could wash away many diseases. He felt that much of the sickness in society came from laziness, lack of exercise and what we would call "junk food" today.

As Dr. Wesselhoeft explained it, a typical treatment day began at four in the morning, when the patient was wrapped in thick woolen blankets to sweat out all of the body's impurities. Once the patient had developed a good, visible sweat they were then placed in a cold bath. This deliberate shock to the system was believed to be very cleansing and restorative.

Once the bath was finished, the patient was sent out to walk and drink spring water along the Whetstone Brook. During a typical day, patients could walk seven miles or more. Meals consisted of simple, lightly cooked plates of whole grains, fruits and



Wesselhoeft Water Cure on the corner of Church and Elliot Streets, current site of Central Fire Station. (Photo: BHS Photo Collection, c. 1850)

vegetables; compared with the greasy, well-cooked meals of the mid-1800's. Besides rigorous bathing, the water cure had two other major tenets: a communal, supportive atmosphere and an emphasis on outdoor exercise.

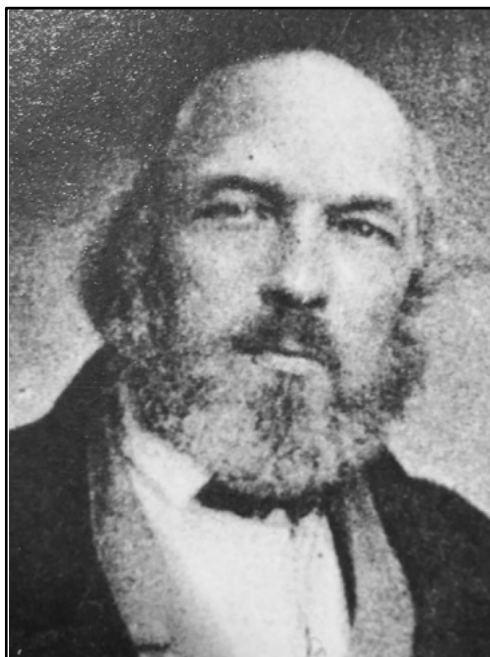
In the mid-1800's Victorian-era women did not have many freedoms. They were controlled by a male-dominated American society, so, if you could afford it, the Water Cure became a bit of an escape. The fee was approximately \$10 a week, a hefty sum in the 1850's.

Roughly two thirds of the Water Cure patients were women. Women were separated from men at the Water Cure and children were not allowed. Dr. Wesselhoeft expected women to participate in the outdoor exercise routine, just as men did. An equality of the sexes existed at the Water Cure that did not exist in general society.

The demand for the Water Cure was overwhelming. Dr. Wesselhoeft purchased two buildings where the present fire station is now on Elliot Street. He began with fifteen patients and expanded to serve 150 clients at a time during his first year. Dr. Wesselhoeft quickly added on to his facilities...a dancing salon, bath houses, bowling alley, billiards room and gymnasium were added within the first few years. By 1846

there were almost 400 patients at the Water Cure at a time and each year up to 800 clients would pass through the Water Cure treatments.

In 1849 train tracks made their way to Brattleboro and the Water Cure prospered even more. While there were many "water cures" across the nation, the Brattleboro Hydropathic Institution became the most fashionable, most expensive, and best known center for hydropathic treatments in the country.



Dr. Robert Wesselhoeft (Photo: BHS Photo Collection, c. 1850)

Famous people like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Stonewall Jackson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Martin Van Buren's family and Francis Parkman were patients at the facility.

Today, you see many people carrying their water bottles around with them. The importance of water as part of a healthy lifestyle is obvious. In the mid-1800's this was not the case. Before Dr. Wesselhoeft came to Brattleboro he was run out of Boston by the famous Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Holmes publicly humiliated Wesselhoeft and accused him of being a quack. Holmes went on to say that Wesselhoeft's water cure was nothing more than a rip off. Some of Wesselhoeft's practices seemed radical, but one of his recommendations is still with us...the idea of drinking eight glasses of water each day began with the water cures over 170 years ago.

Visit us: **Our Website:** <https://brattleborohistoricalsociety.org/>, **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/brattleboro.history/>, **Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/BrattHistSoc>, **SoundCloud:** <https://soundcloud.com/bratthistoricalsoc>, **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/brattleborohistoricalsociety/>

History Center and Museum Update

In 2018 the History Center and Museum had 271 visitors, both local and out of states residents. We had a few visitors from England, France and Germany as well.

We closed the History Center for the winter in order to reorganize and make space for our display:

"Brattleboro: the Defining Decades: 1870-1920" which was in Montpelier for 6 months. Much of it is currently at the River Garden through February and on February 26 we will be displaying the entire exhibition from 4-7 pm at the River Garden.

We will be posting our new

hours for the History Center and Museum on all our social media sites as well as the Brattleboro Reformer. We would love to hear from our local residents for new display ideas you might want us to include in the future.

*-Daniel Guadalupe
History Center Manager*

More Exhibit Donors and a Correction

Again our hearty thanks to the more than 50 individuals and businesses who together donated more than \$4000 in support of the Brattleboro history exhibit at the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier.

The last newsletter listed donors through the summer. Since then there have been several more. Our thanks to: Michael Bosworth, James and Annette Cappy, John and Mary Carnahan, Richard Hamilton, Fan Leonard, David Manning Inc., and Melinda Taggard.

And an apology to Michael Bosworth who was incorrectly listed in the last issue as a business donor.



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Ice skating down the sidewalk on the south side of High Street heading to town, undoubtedly rushing their BHS membership envelope to the post office! Please renew your membership! Do you recognize these children? Let us know! (BHS Brattleboro Reformer Photo Collection, 1950s)