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Lee Ha

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BHS Volunteers Out and About

Although we all love volunteering in the Research Room and Museum, we don't always sit behind our computers, research, answer emails or file photos and papers!

In June, the public was invited to experience our new online walking tour of Brattleboro. It was

still in the rough state, so we are grateful for the input of those who came out on the beautiful sunny day and gave their suggestions.

We were happy to participate in the July 4th parade and see some of our facebook followers.

And it was brought to our attention by a

gentleman visiting from England, that the Wells family plot in Prospect Hill Cemetery was grossly overgrown. We took care of that in several work sessions, although many more overgrown plots remain.



Left: June 15 BHS members and local citizens learned some history beginning at the Civil War Monument on the Common before heading down Main Street with our online walking tour. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)

Right: Intrepid BHS folk brave the heat to walk in the 4th of July Parade. L to R Joe Rivers, Peter Root, Lyle Holiday and Bill Holiday. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)

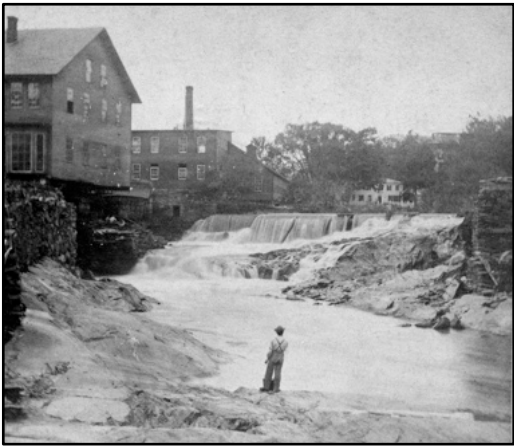


Wells Family Plot, Prospect Hill Cemetery. Jane Fletcher, (Vermont Old Cemetery Association member), Mary White (Friends of Brattleboro Cemeteries) and Lee Ha (BHS trustee and volunteer) put in hours to clean up the grossly overgrown but very important W. Wells family plot. See page 11 for "Which Wells Family was Which?" (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)

150 Years Ago...

Did you know that 150 years ago this year, Brattleboro was devastated by not one but two disasters? In Early October the freshet of 1869 washed out the Main Street Bridge which severed the town in two and destroyed many buildings along the Whetstone Brook. Only several weeks later the west side of Main Street between Elliot Street and High Street burned to the ground, taking with it the many businesses that lined the street..

Left: On October 4, 1869 A devastating flood took out the Main Street Bridge over the Whetstone Brook, along with mills and factories. The bridge would have spanned the brook from south to north (left to right) in this photo. (BHS Photo Collection, 1869)



October 31, 1869 Fire destroyed the entire west side of Main Street from Elliot Street (left) to High Street (right) (BHS Photo Collection, 1869)

Wesselhoeft Water Cure Patient Index Available Online

Jerry Carbone (former director of Brooks Memorial Library) has created a searchable index of patients who visited the Wesselhoeft Water Cure. It has been made available free of charge, please check it out by following the link at Jerry's Genealogical Research Blog:

<http://whetstonebrookgenealogy.com>

"The database Brattleboro, VT- Wesselhoeft Water Cure, 1845-1848, provides an indexed listing of the many people who came to Brattleboro Vermont to take advantage of the therapeutic benefits of a spa run by Dr. Wesselhoeft. Notable people included author and abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe (Uncle Tom's Cabin), poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Song of Hiawatha and Evangeline); and American historian, Francis Parkman Jr, to name a few."



Wesselhoeft Water Cure, corner of Church Street and Elliot Street, (BHS Photo Collection, c. 1850)

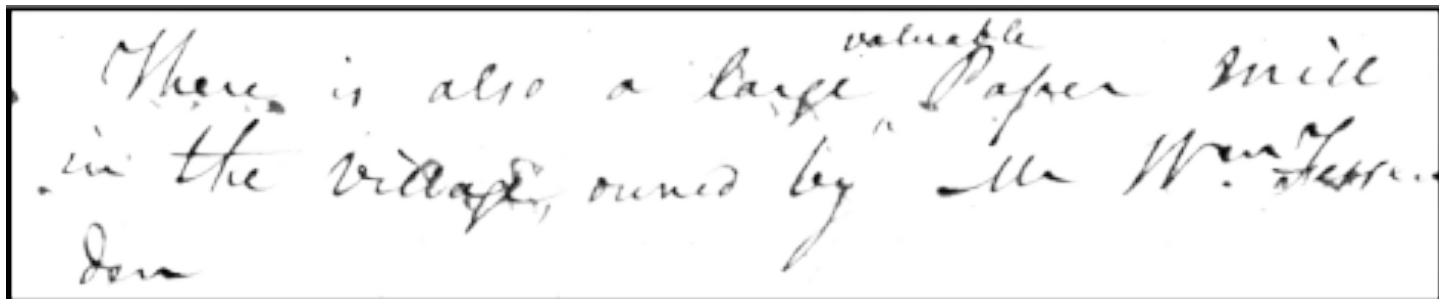
Brattleboro in 1814: By Samuel Elliot

Brattleboro Historical Society often receives artifacts, ephemera and photographs of surrounding towns or items with more of an interest to Vermont in general. We most often pass these items on to the proper historical society and they certainly

reciprocate. One such item we received in digital form from Vermont Historical Society is a very early description of Brattleboro written by early settler Samuel Elliot for whom Elliot Street is named.

Some fun items to watch for

while reading are major industries, farming products and geographical descriptions including roads, as well as names we no longer use. Full of surprises, read on to see what our town was like over 200 years ago.



Excerpt from description of Brattleboro in 1814 written by Samuel Elliot. Vermont Historical Society has the original document.

Josiah Dunham, Esq
August 11, 1814

Dear Sir

I send you such information as I can obtain relative to this town, agreeably requests.

Brattleboro - The soil is generally deep and good - producing Wheat, Rye, Corn, grass in abundance. There is some interval on Connecticut + West River of excellent quality. There are two respectable villages in town - one at the Centre, the other more generally called the Village at the River.

The staple articles are beef, pork, mutton + cheese - English grain + corn is likewise raised for market.

No. Horses about 450 - Sheep — Cattle 2500 about

No Lakes or ponds of consequence.

Connecticut River washes the east side of the town - West River runs a few miles thro' the NE part of it, and enters Conn't. River, about a mile above the River Village.

No mountains of importance - West River Mountain (on N.H. side) lies opposite this town.

There is a toll and bridge over Connecticut River, connecting this

town with NH. - and another over West River at its confluence with Conn't River.

The Windham Turnpike Company Road begins at the Meeting house, and passes to Marlboro - then over the Green Mountains to Bennington - There is also a large river + stage road running thro' the village - likewise a large road leading from the village westward, by the meeting house to Marl. V. and another from R. Village to Dummerston, Newfane, Townsend, V.

Manufactures - There is a Cotton Factory in the village with -----of bricks + wood - Expense \$ erected + owned by Francis Goodhue, Esq. - and a woolen + cotton factory at the Centre of the town - of wood - expense \$7000.00 - with 104 spindles, erected + owned by Mr. Miner Butler.

There are also two patent machines upon different construction for manufacturing + smoothing card boards one invented by Mr. Elihu Hotchkiss + the other by Mr. Daniel Stearns.

There is also a large valuable Paper Mill in the village, owned by Mr. Wm. Fesseden.

Distilleries - There are several

for distilling Cyder + one erected by Mr. S. Wellington - one, by Mr. J. Hadley and one by Mr. D. Goodenough.

There is an Academy near the Centre of the town, established in 1801 - the first preceptor was Rev'd Mr Hutchins successor, Mr Palmer, Newton, Bancroft, and Mr Luke Whitcomb, present preceptor. There is a Printing office and large Book Store owned by Mr. Fesseden, in the Village.

The first Congregational minister, (no other denomination prevails here) was the Rev'd Mr. Reeve - Rev'd Mr. Wells, formerly an English Clergyman, has preached here for many years - Rev'd Burge is the present minister.

No. of annual births - 60 - 70 - deaths about 18

It is a place of considerable business, and a lively growing town.

Yours X

Samuel Elliot

ps place my name to list of subscribers

—Transcribed by Lee Ha with help from Harriet Ives

Neighborhoods: Centreville

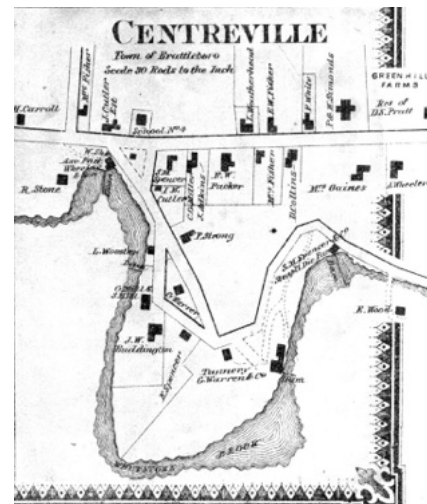


Above section taken from 1860 C. W. Grau Map, 1860.

Centreville is a nearly forgotten neighborhood located mainly on Western Avenue, the busy Vermont Deli thrives today in the heart of it. Extending along Western Avenue from approximately I-91, Exit 2 to the Creamery Bridge, it includes Guilford Street to Elm Corners (intersection of Maple St. and Guilford St.) and the western end of Williams Street. The first mention of Centreville in newspapers was an 1855 in an advertisement. Centreville was once such a thriving community on its own that it was labeled as prominently as both its neighbors to the east

(Brattleboro) and west (West Brattleboro) as early as 1860 (see map above). Centreville once had thriving industries which included several large mills, farms and of course Centreville Store. (see photo right)

BHS Trustee Karen Davis recently reminisced with other board members of life growing up in Centreville and we'd like to share those memories with you. Following Karen Davis' remembrances are some thoughts of Robert Cushman, written in 1960, of his childhood a generation or two before Karen's in Centreville. The entirety of Mr. Cushman's memories



"Centreville" inset from 1869 Beers Map in Atlas of Windham County.

can be found in a BHS newsletter from 2007.

KAREN DAVIS: Centreville, like Centre Congregational Church, is spelled with "re" rather than "er."

Like Richard Mitchell, (at an early age) I remember walking through the snow one evening with my brother and father up to the Centreville Store and back. A storm had left a coat of ice on all the tree limbs, making it a magical world to walk in. There were street lights shining, but no cars driving along Western Avenue, and no I-91.

Walking solo "up to the store" for a loaf of bread or a jug of milk was a rite of passage for us kids. Then riding our bikes there became the thing to do. "Stop by 'the store' on the way home," always meant Centreville.

(Any other store was named specifically as the A&P, Public Market, Grand Union, First National, etc.).

Old Jay Curtis was the first proprietor of the store I knew. He was a crusty old fellow, often grumpy about running the business in his old age. He was always friendly and kind to my Grandmother though, when she came to visit.

Roland LaRose bought the store, and was as serious as Jay Curtis. It must've been a lot of work and long



Centreville Store/ LaRose's Country Store Note Centreville Mill behind and trolley tracks on Western Avenue. (BHS Photo Collection, c.1910)

hours, for very little profit. His wife substituted for him as time went on.

We felt lucky when their son Tony served as cashier; he was closer to our age and recognized us personally. He married Sharon Underwood, a Senior High majorette who was a year ahead of me at BUHS.

Milk and ice cream were kept in the walk-in cooler for the cashier to bring out as requested. I still can hear the snap of the metal handle as the door was opened, and the "thwump" as the door was swung shut.

The Centreville School was taken over by Green Mountain Chapel who expanded it to the rear. Then they outgrew it and built the white church across Western Avenue closer to the Covered Bridge.

Centreville lost its neighborhood name-recognition when the Vermont Country Deli took over the store, changed its name, and became more of a gourmet than a convenience store.

The two buildings sitting across from each other on Western Avenue still represent "Centreville" to me! It must have been fun when the trolley stopped there on its way to West Bee. That was before my time.

* * *

ROBERT CUSHMAN: There were houses along the east side of Guilford Street up to Elm Corners. All the west side was Grandpa Brigg's Farm. [Living Memorial Park today]

The field in front of our house sometimes flooded in a January thaw and I had a skating pond. One time when Dad tried to flood it with a hose I slipped when running to the window and cut my ear and side of my head on the corner of the safe. That is the cause of the nick on my right ear. When there was a big thaw we sometimes had a large skating pond.

When I was in the eighth grade I became interested in 'wireless,' and Grandpa Briggs sold me a 60 ft. chestnut pole that Dad had a telephone crew set for me. It was a landmark for many years after I left home.



Centreville Mill, Williams Street, over the years housed a furniture manufacturer, Bickford Knitting Machines, roller skating rink, rug factory, barrel shop and cider mill. (Lewis R. Brown BHS Photo Collection, c. 1930)



Centreville School and students, directly across Western Avenue from Centreville Store. Today, Phoenix House. (BHS Photo Collection, 1889)

There was a dam in the [Whetstone] Brook for generating power for a mill there and for the trolley line. Another thing the brook provided was a swimming hole where I learned to swim but Ma didn't like to have me go there because the sewer to West Brattleboro emptied into the brook.

After Grandpa Briggs died, but while the buildings were still there, a ski tow was installed and became a part of "Living Memorial Park." When the

farm was bought mostly with the proceeds from War Savings Bonds donated by the townspeople for a memorial to World War II soldiers.

* * *

We are grateful to our long-time local residents who have stories to tell and share with us for Brattleboro history archives. Do you have a story to tell? Please come to the Research Room to tell us about it, or write it and we'll put it safely in our files for future generations!



First home of Rescue, Inc. at the corner of Clark Street and Canal Street. 1968, Rescue was organized by the volunteers of the Brattleboro Ski Patrol and Brattleboro Firefighters with a dream of helping those in need of emergency medical help. From \$10 and an old truck bought for \$1, Rescue has grown to be an integral part of our community. Today it is located on the west side of Canal Street near I-91, Exit 1.



Garden Apartments on the corner of Bradley Avenue and Putney Road, built in 1964. B. R. Brown designed and managed the apartments and they were advertised as the "Brattleboro's first Garden Apartments" The building stands today, much unchanged excepting an addition on the south end with landscaping adorning the front.

Our Scanning Brattleboro Scanned from BHS B Negative C

The Brattleboro Reformer donated years ago, but it wasn't until a few years ago that we had the capability to scan negatives. We conducted a scanning session so be sure to check it out. Better yet, come to our research room to see the digitized photos! (All photos from the BHS Collection, c. 1960s)



Dr. Grace Burnett Memorial Chapel, a Kiwanis shelter near the top of Livestock Hill. The chapel was built by the Brattleboro Business and Professional Men's Quota Club, the outdoor chapel was used for services of interdenominational churches. A Brattleboro Reformer article regarding the chapel will be toward the northeast with a stone Altar and podium will be created on a concrete foundation. The seating will be of field stone on the incline of the slope." Today the chapel is consumed by trees and the view obscured. The calming chapel remains. Dr. Grace Burnett, a female physician and well loved by the community.

ing Project: in the 1960s Brattleboro Reformer Collection

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BHS Brattleboro Reformer



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all.



Living Memorial Park, Guilford Street, winter 1968. The T-Bar and buildings have not changed much from the time Memorial Park was still fairly young, 51 years ago. But the cars have certainly changed! Mentioned in the Centreville article on page 4/5 of this newsletter, it was previously the Briggs Farm and Clark Farm.



Schaff Opticians on High Street. Located in the Brooks House between the Oak Room (later Mole's Eye Cafe) and the Pickwick Room, it was a fixture on High Street for 42 years, from 1969-2011 when lingering effects of the recession forced closure of many small businesses in Brattleboro including Schaff Opticians.

Bits of History: Stairs in the Woods



Derelict stairs leading into the woods at the corner of Pine Street and Maple Street. (Lee Ha, 2019)



Fuller Mansion "Pine Heights" (BHS Postcard Collection, c. 1900)

Have you ever noticed the stairs in the woods at the intersection of Pine and Canal Streets heading up the hill toward Brattleboro Memorial Hospital? Did you wonder where they lead, or why they are there?

These are remnants of the walking entryway to one of the most impressive mansions in old Brattleboro, "Pine Heights," Governor and Mrs. Levi Fuller's estate. Once a grand and welcoming home with a massive library, and gardens, their

property extended to the Catholic Cemetery to the east and from Pine Street, north, to Oak Grove Avenue, south.

The Fuller's were a highly respected family, well-educated and welcoming, holding grand parties and gatherings for many of the towns citizens. Governor Fuller owned numerous patents in his lifetime, was an owner of the Estey Organ Factory and well-loved in this town. Mrs. Fuller (nee Estey), was a prolific essayist and

known to be quite charming.

Today, walking up the stairs leads one through the woods along a path with remains of bricks and old broken handrail posts under the many years of fallen and decomposed leaves and pine needles. At the top of the hill is the aptly named "Pine Heights at Brattleboro Center for Nursing & Rehabilitation."

—Lee Ha

Then and Now



Creamery Bridge, with milk delivery cart. Creamery is in background center right of photo. (BHS Photo Collection, date unknown)



Creamery Bridge, built in 1879, is no longer used for traffic. Note the added walk on the east side of bridge. (Lee Ha, 2019)

What's New at Estey Organ Museum

“Amazing.” “Beautiful.” “Awesome.” Those are some of the visitor comments in the guest book at the Estey Organ Museum so far this season.

The visitors were responding not just to the fine wood craftsmanship of the organs and the impressiveness of the former engine room turned into exhibit space.

What everyone loves is that you can play all the organs – from a 1860s melodeon to a 1940s portable Army chaplain’s organ. And, most popular of all, the walk-through pipe organ.

This hands-on quality of the museum has captured the attention of



A young visitor tries out the Estey pipe organ. (R.F.George, 2018)

the traveling public and the media. Last year brought quite a flurry of publicity, beginning in May with the online travel journal, *Atlas Obscura*. Their article, titled “The Vermont town that has way too many organs,” is still viewable on the internet. Other regional media coverage followed, plus a Japanese film crew in October.

This season, which began in May, saw coverage in the *Boston Globe* and Boston TV. Visitors so far have included more than 60 Brattleboro Middle School students in the final weeks of school, on a history walking tour.

Among other EOM developments for 2019:

—The compact disc that was included in Dennis Waring’s *Manufacturing the Muse* has been reissued as a standalone. It features Victorian-era music on Estey organs from all over New England, and includes Brattleboro-area performers Becky Graber and Ned Phoenix. It can be ordered on the EOM website.

—In progress is a brief orientation video explaining the history of the company and its effect on

Brattleboro, to be debuted later this summer in the museum.

—The Brattleboro Words project

recently recorded three podcasts about Estey to be part of the Words Trail to history sites around Windham County.

—A two-manual-and-pedal electric-powered reed organ received as a bequest in 2017 was rehabilitated by Ned Phoenix last month. Now playable.

—The colorful but non-working pipe organ that has been on exhibit for years was removed to storage awaiting a new owner who can afford to restore it. Interested?

—Re-homing continues informally as a way to get repairable organs into the hands of people who will reuse them. Most recently two broken organ cases were acquired by a guitar maker who will use the antique wood to make bodies for electric guitars.

Other popular continuing exhibits include photos of organ pipe construction by the Anderson family, playable tabletop organs (not Estey), exhibit of types of reeds and pipes, and many posters and photos.

The museum is open every Saturday and Sunday afternoon from 2 to 4pm until mid-October. Membership information is at www.esteyorganmuseum.org.

—Barbara George

Donations From You!

Since our last newsletter we have received many old historical gifts for the collection.

Dorothy Dunklee Gavins gave many family materials -- a Quebecor Sign and a C.H Eddy bottle came from Joseph Crowley - Doug Record gave some photos of the Hillwinds Farm - an 1840 stagecoach list came from Jerry Carbone.

Multiple family items of the Pratt family were mailed from Joan Lewis of Rome NY - Charles

Butterfield gave 28 Kipling books - Janet Hertzberg of Contoocook, NH gave a family Bible (all printed in the Swedish Language).

A large collection of clothing of the Governor Ernest Gibson family together with files of his speeches and family photo came in from his daughter Grace Newcomer.

Wesley Staples of Westmoreland, NH gave us a handwritten notebook of servicemen, including names and serial numbers,

who registered for service in October 1940. Thank you to Robert Tortolani for delivering it to us. Brattleboro related ephemera came to us via mail from Jo-ann Tier of North Hero.

Just before printing this newsletter we received a large donation from Dana Sprague with Fort Dummer artifacts, the Colonels 1973 Football State Champion scrap book, much ephemera and several framed items.

Many thanks to all!

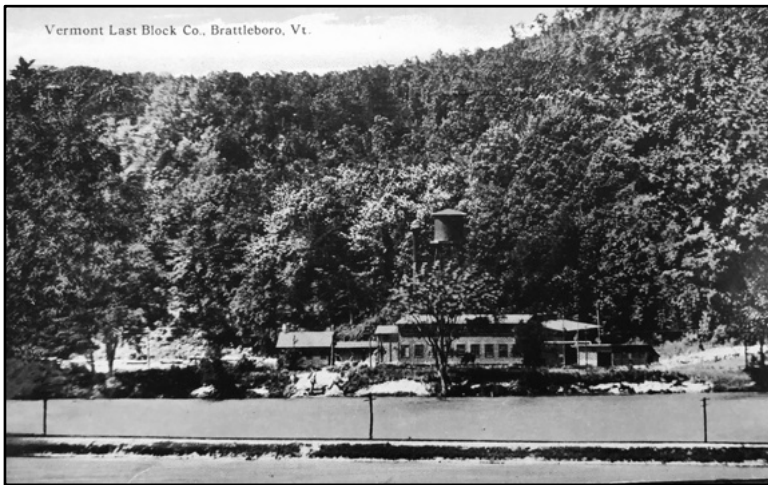
Last Block Company

BHS recently received this picture postcard (above left) from James Darnell in Williamsburg, Virginia. We have a large collection of Brattleboro postcards but none showing Vermont Last Block Co. In fact, none of us had ever heard of this company.

According to WITH INTEREST booklet, Vol. IX, April 1922, No. 1, entitled A Local Chronology of Brattleboro, Vt., the company came to Brattleboro in May 1912, and it was located on Vernon Road. It closed in March 1917. They

cut blocks of wood from which shoe lasts could be turned or shaped to be used in the making or repairing of shoes, shipping the blocks to New York City to be finished.

—John Carnahan



Vermont Last Block Co. Brattleboro. Colorized postcard (BHS Postcard Collection, c 1915)



Two wooden shoe lasts from BHS collection which were used by Jonathan Dunklee (1755-1815), an early Brattleboro shoemaker.

History Center Update and Welcome Ellen Dudley

This year the History Center opened in April as we needed to reorganize for new exhibits. Since opening we've had 115 visitors, many local people including Brattleboro Middle School students. BHS also had exhibits at Brattleboro Union High School of the Estey Organ Company and First Baptist Church. The new exhibit in progress at the History Center will be the First Baptist Church: 200 Years of History and will include archives, artifacts and photos. Visit us from Thursdays from 12-2, or Fridays from 2-4. All are welcome.

Ellen Dudley is the friendly face you see when you visit BHS Museum on Main St. She comes to the Brattleboro Historical Society from Agency for Training & Development. She has been with A4TD for over a year and formerly worked for the Strolling of the Heifers in Brattleboro. Ellen has worked variously as a

surgical tech, a co-owner of a remodeling company, writer, teacher and founder & editor-in-chief of the Marlboro Review from 1996 -- 2008. She is author of two books of poetry: *Slow Burn* (1997, Provincetown Arts Press, Provincetown MA) and *The Geographic Cure* (2007, Four Way Books, NYC) and is working on a memoir and another book of poetry.

If poetry had not taught her that we all come from a long line of dead people, she has certainly learned it in her few months at the historical society which she is enjoying greatly.

Ellen has a daughter, Laura, and son-in-law, Joe who live near the Columbia Gorge in Oregon as well as a 9 yo grandson, Reed, who refers to her as Tutu which is Hawai'ian for grandmother because she was spending a good deal of time there when he was born and was a little guy. He still calls her that and she likes it because it in no

way refers to or implies anyone's age! Ellen lives in Marlboro, Vermont with her husband Tony Gordon, a mid-size rottweiler and two bossy cats.



Ellen Dudley reading about Jim Fisk in "Before Our Time" before getting to the job of helping the Museum and Research Room run efficiently.

Which Wells Family was Which?

I recently became aware that there were several well-known Wells' families in town all 200-250 years ago at a time when Brattleboro's population was only between 1500-2000. I presumed they must have been related, but how? There is Samuel Wells who lived off Upper Dummerston Road in the very early years of Brattleboro, and of course William Wells who was one of the first preachers to give a sermon in the Meetinghouse up on Orchard St. What about Dr. Henry Wells? And which one is the Wells Fountain named for? My research brought some interesting results.

The first of the Wells mento arrive in this town was Colonel Samuel Wells (see BHS newsletter #51, summer 2017). He was born in Deerfield MA, in 1730. Brattleboro's first representative, he was a well known Tory. He had a large family, initially lived in a self-built log cabin at a dangerous time when Native Americans were protecting their land and early pioneers were just venturing beyond the safety of Fort Dummer. He eventually built a large home to house his expanding family on what is now Brattleboro Retreat land, above Cold Springs. He passed away in Brattleboro in 1786. All his offspring left for Canada by the beginning of the 1800s when they were offered 1200 acres for their father's support during the Revolutionary War.

Dr. Henry Wells was Brattleboro's first elected Town Clerk, elected in 1768. He was born in New Jersey in 1742, and was no relation to Colonel Samuel Wells. He was a Yale graduate and received a A.M. degree. After living in New York City for some time, he made his way up the



Wells Fountain erected in 1890, designed by William Rutherford Mead and built by Moses Deyo. This iconic structure in Brattleboro marks the north end of Main Street and once served as a watering stop for horses. (BHS Photo Collection, c.1900)

Connecticut River to the vastly still unsettled Brattleboro in the 1760s with his wife and 2 children. He built a large home 2 miles west of the Connecticut River in what is now West Brattleboro. He was involved in public office through the 13 years he was in Brattleboro and continued his medical practice. He and his wife had 7 more children before they left for Montague, Massachusetts. It was there that he received his honorary MD degree from Dartmouth College and became a prominent physician who "attained the most distinguished rank." (Burnham's biographical sketches) He passed in 1814.

Arguably the best known was Rev. William Wells, DD. Dr. William Wells was the first minister of the church in the East Village. He was born

in England in 1744 and as it turns out was no relation to either of the other two Wells gentlemen. He came to this side of the Atlantic Ocean in 1793 looking for a non-slave state and hoping to avoid wilderness. He was a Patriot and sided with the colonies in the Revolutionary War.

Upon arriving here, he purchased a farm and 400 acres. Although there are conflicting stories, it is generally thought that he purchased the original home of Samuel Wells, above Cold Springs on Upper Dummerston Road. He began preaching at the Meetinghouse on Meetinghouse Hill. Eventually the growing population in the East Village decided to build a Meetinghouse or Church close to town, on what is now the Common. William Wells was understanding and empathetic to all who he met and thus loved by his congregation. It is said to have been built

specifically for William Wells. The Church was later dismantled and moved to Main Street (Centre Congregational Church). He died in 1827 at the age of 83 years.

So the question still remains: for whom is the Wells Fountain named? Surprisingly, none of the above. Mr. William Henry Wells (grandson of Reverend William Wells) a businessman born in Brattleboro and living most his life elsewhere. He did, however, spend so many joyous summers here, that he funded the building of the fountain, thus the fountain is named. The Wells Fountain was erected in 1890, and William Henry Wells died the following year in 1891.

—Lee Ha



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Moving Day, parked on Main Street, near Elliot Street, in front of the Vermont People's National Bank with Crosby Block behind. Note J.E. Mann's, Brattleboro Restaurant, and Whelan Drugs signs. (BHS Brattleboro Reformer photo Collection, 1951)