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History Center and Museum

Closed until mid-March
196 Main Street

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Newsletter compiled by:

Lee Ha

Annual Program of Music and History

On Sunday, November 17, 2019 we held our Annual Meeting in the First Baptist Church. The highlight of the afternoon was organist Robin Dinda's Estey Organ presentation. Mr. Dinda is a professor at Fitchburg State University and Director of Music at The First Parish in Fitchburg. He is also a composer of hundreds of works for a variety of media. His published organ compositions have been performed at concerts, stage productions and religious services throughout North America, Europe and Japan.

We were very fortunate to have him share historical information about the

local Estey Organ Company, the particular 1906 Estey Organ in the First Baptist Church, and most especially, hear him demonstrate the unique sounds that can be generated with a large Estey organ. Mr. Dinda performed various compositions which highlighted his virtuosity and the complex nature of the Estey Pipe Organ.

After Mr. Dinda's performance we were able to tour the church and even ring the bell! On display next door in the BHS History Center and Museum were artifacts of the First Baptist Church.

-Joe Rivers



Mr. Robin Dinda presented a wonderful program of music, as well as an explanation of the parts of and history of the Estey Organ, detailing how it's played, followed by an informative question and answer period. Refreshments were served and members toured the church for a final time. See next page for history of the Baptist Church congregation. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2020)

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Interior of the church about 100 years ago during a funeral for a WWI pilot. The organ was located in the center, rather than off to the right as it is today. The gentleman to the right of the organ is standing ready for a solo and he has been identified as board member Karen Davis's great Uncle Ernest V. Barre. (Photo: Benjamin Crown, c. 1917)

Early Baptist Church Congregation Stirred Things Up in Brattleboro

Before the phrase "social justice" had much traction in our culture there was the First Baptist Church on Main Street. It was consecrated in 1870, after more than 2 years of construction, and the congregation was born in the fire of controversy and struggle.

In 1840 an itinerant revivalist minister named Emerson Andrews came to Brattleboro and preached a series of sermons which challenged the status quo. At that time the town was dominated by English Congregationalist residents who owned many of the influential businesses and property in the community.

Part of Andrew's revivalist message was that current society was unjust and that individuals needed to admit their shortcomings and re-commit themselves to a truer interpretation of the social teachings of the Bible. During that first year of revivalism in 1840, eighty seven people became members of the Baptist congregation. Among those who officially became one of the first members of the newly formed Baptist Society in Brattleboro East Village was a young 26 year old plumber named Jacob Estey. He was chosen to oversee the finances of the fledgling church and

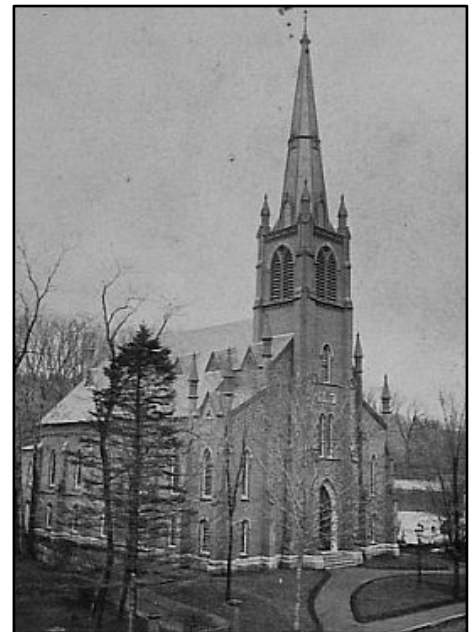
seems to have handled the task well. In 1840 the construction of the Baptist Church on Elliot Street cost \$2,700.

At that time Baptists were thought by many to be rabble rousers. Their meetings were lively and possessed a vitality that decried religious indifference and promoted a renewed commitment to faithful practice. Baptists were missionaries who supported public renewals of faith and the recruitment of others to their cause. Vermont Baptists opposed slavery and found they were converting locals to their faith from the more conservative Congregational Church. This led to controversy in the Brattleboro community. While many of the Brattleboro influencers in the 1840's did not claim to be pro-slavery they did claim to be pro-United States and argued that the abolition of slavery would bring the collapse of the union of states. As local historian Mary Cabot wrote, "It was almost persecution that the Baptists of that time had to endure." In the 1840's "there was a short time of extreme sectarian bitterness towards the Baptists, such as can hardly be appreciated now."

Through the years the Baptist's have continued their work for social justice. One of the latest manifestations

was the seasonal overflow shelter for the homeless. The last Baptist service of the congregation in its Main Street home was held in late November 2019. It marked the end of an era for the building that held its first service February 2, 1868.

-Joe Rivers



*Early Baptist Church, Main Street.
(Photo: BHS Stereo Card collection, c. 1870)*

Don't forget to renew your membership to BHS with the enclosed envelope. Brattleboro Historical Society is an all-volunteer organization and your support helps to keep Brattleboro's history safe, available and alive for future generations.

Donations From You!

Since our last newsletter the following gifts have come in: a metal belt buckle marked "Brattleboro BHS" from Laura Pucel of Pembroke, Maine, a large box of Brattleboro related portraits from Alan Mathews of Nottingham, NH, a plaque of Chestnut Hill golfing was received from Diane Shapiro of Brattleboro, a wooden desk and chair from the old Academy School came from Nancy Patnode, Hopkinton, NH, Fan Perry Leonard of Hingham, MA sent a typewritten description of the old Baptist Church on Elliot St. written in 1932, Bill Callahan gave 2 photos of Madame Sherri from a 1980 paper, the Historical Society of Cheshire County shared a framed photo of the Brattleboro Civil War Hospital.

-Many thanks to all!

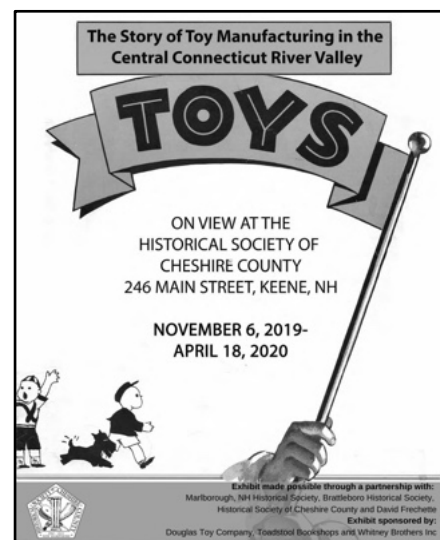
Toys: The Story of Toy Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley

BHS is proud to be a part of this comprehensive historical look at toy manufacturers in the area. The Toys exhibit is a collaboration between the Historical Society of Cheshire County, the Brattleboro Historical Society, Marlborough Historical Society and others, along with local people with connections to toy manufacturers.

This fun exhibit examines the

toy industry from the 1850s onward, delving into the history of children's playthings. Everything used in toy fabrication, from wood and metal to rubber and fabric, you will find displayed through mid-April in Keene. Don't let the winter go by without enjoying a trip across the river to this nostalgic voyage down memory lane.

-Lee Ha



Above: Toy Exhibit advertisement from HSCC website

Far left: Bradley toy bowling set from BHS

Left: Child's Estey Organ from Estey Organ Museum (Photos Lee Ha, 2020)

An Estey Organ for Your Parlor?

Looking for a rewarding hands-on winter project? If you're a do-it-yourselfer and enjoy fix-it work we invite you to adopt and repair an Estey parlor organ.

In the years before the Estey Organ Museum (EOM) was founded, BHS accepted donations of more than 60 Estey reed organs. These were

usually instruments that their owners no longer wanted (no space? no longer playable?) but couldn't bear to send to the dump. After all, every one of them says "Brattleboro Vermont" right above the keyboard.

Though BHS stopped accepting organs after 2002 when EOM was established, the 60-plus earlier acquisitions are still BHS's responsibility and are in storage at the Estey factory complex. They are beautiful pieces of furniture but mostly do not play. What should happen to these instruments? Though the storage rent is minimal there is no reason to keep them if they will never be displayed or studied.

In the summer of 2015 BHS invited a reed organ specialist to survey its organ collection and make recommendations. What, if anything, should be kept? transferred to EOM? given away to hobbyists for repair or

parts? EOM did a similar survey of its 100-plus organs in storage and in 2016 began a re-homing project, giving away some of the unplayable or duplicate organs to interested musicians or tinkerers.

BHS joined in the re-homing by moving 16 organs identified as duplicates or poor quality to a ground-floor garage space where they can be seen and adopted. Some are past saving for musical purposes but might make a nice desk or stereo cabinet. Others might require only cleaning and bellows repair to play again. You can find organ repair videos on YouTube and extensive instructions on the website of the Reed Organ Society.

Interested?

Call, stop by or send us an email at histsoc@sover.net if you'd like to adopt one of these hundred-year-old examples of beautiful craftsmanship.

-Barbara George



Estey Organs in storage, would you like to adopt one? Contact us! (Robert George, 2020)

Jennie Powers: "The Woman Who Dares"



Mural on the south side of 120 Main Street in Keene, New Hampshire, designed by Ontario artists Elaine Wallis and Noella Cotman. (Photo: courtesy of Walldogs Keene Committee, 2019)

By 1906, Brattleboro's Jennie Powers had been labeled "The Woman Who Dares" by the Boston Post for her work in preventing cruelty to animals in New Hampshire and Vermont. Powers served as agent for the Keene Humane Society from 1903-1936 and became one of the first female deputy sheriffs in New Hampshire by 1910.

Born in Brattleboro, Vermont,

in 1864 Jennie Belle Carter developed a love of the natural world at a very young age. She was often found collecting specimens of insects, reptiles, and small animals. In 1881 she married farm laborer Frank Powers at the age of 17 years. By the turn-of-the 20th century, Powers had gained a reputation for her shooting skills, her role in the study of entomology and

animal science, and her volunteer work with the VT SPCA and Windham County Humane Society.

In 1903, the Keene Humane Society hired Powers as an experiment, to see if hiring a woman would enhance their work. It had been a growing trend at the time to hire women in formerly male-only roles that could use a 'woman's touch' such as teaching,



Jennie Powers with pistol and ailing horse, Keene, New Hampshire (Photo: Historical Society of Cheshire County Collection, c.1930)

healthcare, jail wardens and humane society agents. Soon the organization grew to rely on Powers as she investigated and worked to prosecute hundreds of cases of animal abuse.

Powers was known to march in to worksites such as logging camps, mill yards, farms, and train yards. More than once, she chased carriages down Main Street to check on abused horses. It is said that she once jumped out of a window, taking the screen and all, to tackle a man who was beating his horse on the street. By 1910, the Cheshire County sheriff deputized her.

In 2019, residents of the Monadnock region selected Jennie Powers for inclusion in a city-wide mural project to honor the work she did to prevent cruelty to others. Within the mural, alongside depictions of horses

and pets, is an image of a mother and child. In an age when animal cruelty laws were more defined than laws against family violence, much of Powers' work led her to protect the rights of children and wives who were abused and neglected. Her work in the early 20th century required bravery and physical stamina. Mrs. Powers often received threats from those who had been prosecuted for cruelty. She carried a .44 revolver on her hip and slept with it under her pillow.

"Mrs. Powers' work on behalf of suffering children has given her a front place in the ranks of humanitarians. She has gone into rough logging camps miles away from any village into the homes of outlaws, where male officers feared to go, making her own arrests, sometimes at

the point of a revolver, and then prosecuting the cases in court." [Jan. 4, 1919 Vermont Phoenix]

Jennie Powers died in 1936 at the age of 72 with complications from pneumonia. She is buried in Brattleboro, VT, beside her grandparents. In 1967, the Monadnock Humane Society named their present 250-acre site the Jennie B. Powers Memorial Shelter in her honor. Jennie Powers was a heroic agent of change during a time when women were just beginning to push for rights to vote, to control property, and to have a legal say over the welfare of their own children.

- Jennifer Carroll, Director of Education, Historical Society of Cheshire County

Then and Now



Then: Joe's Auto Body, Spring Street. In 1976 Joe Pazsak opened the long running "Joe's Auto Body." He initially advertised painting refrigerators and lawn furniture as well as autos. Joe died 2005. (Photo: BHS Brattleboro Reformer Photo Collection, 1976)



Now: Notice the deteriorating retaining wall which is now overgrown with both weeds and small trees. Also note the apartment building in background, the original Methodist Church. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2019)



Scanning All photos Reformer Nega

Sunoco Station on the northside of Western Avenue near entrance to Solar Hill. Research shows that as a filling station it was an easy target for burglaries, often showing up in police reports over the years. The building has been attractively renovated and landscaped, and today it is known as Avenue Hair Design.

During a time when a trip to Main Street would find you surrounded by stores selling daily necessities. Mann's, a long-lived clothing store opened in 1901. For many years women would buy their corsets and other undergarments there. In 1967 it expanded to include the new Mann's Country Corner, a sportswear store. Today, Vermont Artisans occupies the original Mann's and Kitchen Sync takes Mann's Country Corner space.



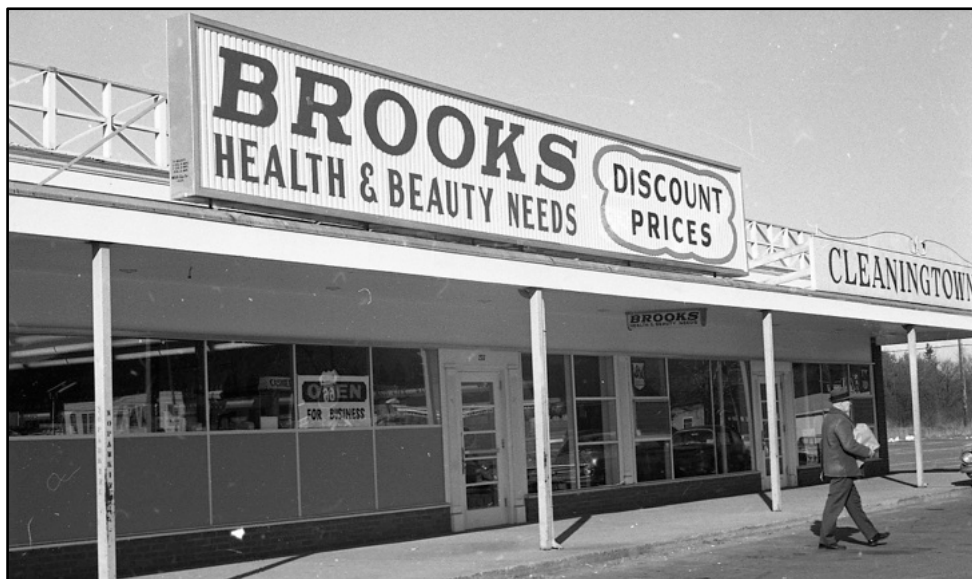
The Welcome Center or Information Booth was previously near the Wells Fountain but was moved in 1957 due to the traffic flow changes at Linden/Main/Putney Road. Finding a home on the east side of the Common, every spring it was a volunteer effort to get the little booth opened by Memorial Day. This involved stocking local brochures and cleaning winter dirt to make the Welcome Center welcoming to tourists. A new but similar building still sits on the Common and fields questions from out-of-town folks all summer.

g Project

BHS 1967

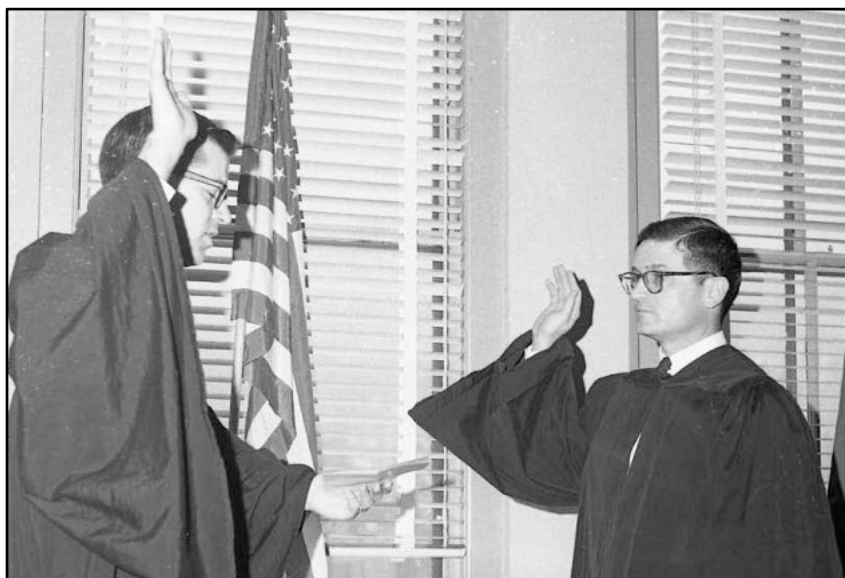
itive Collection

Brooks Health and Beauty Needs was located in the original shopping center at the corner of Canal Street and Fairview Street, previously Clark Farm. This is the current location of the Dollar Store parking lot in Market 32 Plaza. The plaza, including Brooks Drugs, was rebuilt well behind original building making room for more customer parking.



Brooks Memorial Library Main Room, a large, open and bright library compared to the original, handsome brick library down the street. Many local residents still remember fondly, the 'old' library. Today Brooks Memorial Library's large room remains much the same, more books, more shelving and computerization are only some of the changes one may see from this photo.

John Carnahan being sworn in as Vermont District Court Judge by Attorney Timothy O'Connor. This photo was taken in the Municipal Center when the District Court was located on the second floor in what is now the Selectboard's Meeting Room. John is our longest serving board member and current vice-president of the Brattleboro Historical Society.



Scanning Project: Behind the Scenes



Boxes of Brattleboro Reformer negatives from the 1960s through the 1990s located in one of several storage rooms at BHS. Each dated box contains hundreds of envelopes. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2020)



Between 5 and 25 photographic images are in each envelope or sleeve. The project will continue for many years. (Photo Lee Ha, 2020)

Bits of History in Our Midst: Frances Stores

Walking on the east side of Main Street one may notice the yellow tiled entryway with blue lettering spelling Frances Stores, in an unusual print style just outside Zephyr's. Have you ever wondered what Frances Stores was? Research shows that in 1946 the women's specialty shop Frances Stores of Boston moved in. They rented the space, updated the interior and installed an unusual entryway to distinguish it from all other stores in Brattleboro. Advertising touted "Showing Tomorrow's Styles Today" and although the chain had

15 stores throughout New England, the Brattleboro store was the first in Vermont. By April 1963 the Frances Store had become one of several women's specialty shops and sales were dwindling. Doors closed at the end of the month after 17 years on Main Street.

When the sidewalk was replaced in 2015, Zephyr's owner, John Clements, took a year to scrape carpet glue and 3 layers of paint from the entry to reveal the Frances Store logo.

-Lee Ha



Original grand opening advertisement in Brattleboro Reformer, 1946. Note eye-catching entryway with angled display windows. This configuration has not changed.



Blue lettering with yellow background, you will see the original entryway to Frances Stores leading to Zephyr Designs on Main Street. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2020)

Library Archive Project

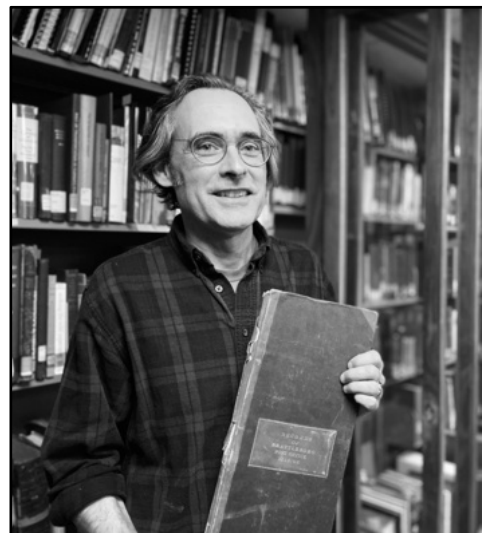
The Brooks Memorial Library's historical collection room – located on the mezzanine – offers a perfect location for a small meeting or an oasis for quietly studying with friends. From the tables, you can observe the various activities in the library's main lobby and events transpiring on lower Main Street, or you can turn and gaze at the contents of the historical collection behind its four pairs of glass doors. As the traffic hurriedly passes by, you can take leave of the present and think about the past of the Brattleboro area, and its neighborhoods, businesses, schools, churches, colleges, forests, and fields.

In 2019, the library developed a project for a community archives based

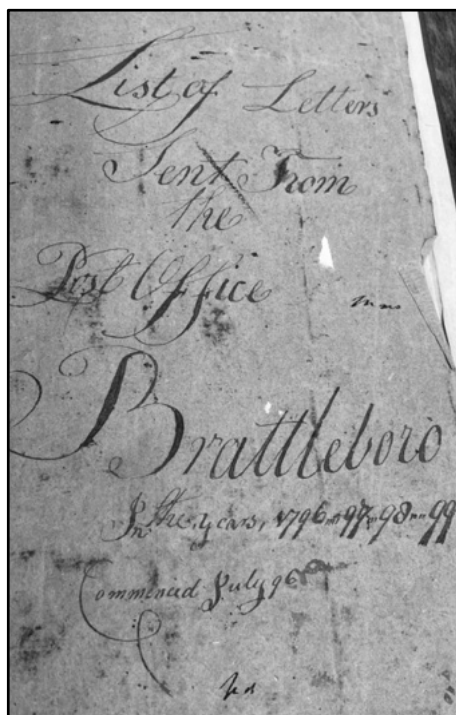
on items already housed and cataloged in the library's local history, genealogical, and art collections. With help from the Vermont Historical Records Program, the library secured two small grants from Vermont foundations and additional support from trustees and Friends. Starting in November, in my role as the project archivist, I began surveying the historical collection item by item to identify any archival materials. Many of these artifacts were hidden in plain sight, because many bindings of 18th and 19th century diaries, ledgers, and scrapbooks resemble printed books from the same time period. Within days, I uncovered a late 18th century post office ledger, a stagecoach logbook from 1828, and an oral history project from the late 1970s chronicling traditional dance music of the region.

The characters who populate these pages include sculptors, inventors, politicians, opera singers, athletes, photographers, tradespeople, farmers, students of all ages, and the indigenous people who first inhabited the region. Some of these records were created by ordinary citizens who filled scrapbooks with letters, newspaper articles, photographs, handbills, theater programs, postcards, or receipts to offer a vivid glimpse into an earlier Brattleboro. As the project continues through the spring and summer 2020 and guided by the Vermont Historical Records Program and the library staff, the archival materials will be grouped into collections, with some pieces identified as possible conservation priorities.

-John Levin, Project Archivist



John Levin (Project Archivist) with one of the oldest 'finds' at Brooks Memorial Library, Local History Room. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2020)



Original cover of post office ledger "List of Letters sent from the Post Office Brattleboro in the years 1796, 97, 98, 99."

ACCOUNT OF LETTERS AND NEWSPAPERS SENT FROM THE POST-OFFICE AT Brattleboro						
Date of the Bills sent	To what Office the Letters were sent	Unpaid Letters		Paid Letters		Free Let- ters
		D.	C.	D.	C.	
1796						
April 2 nd	Windsor		40			
	Cincinnati		50			
	Burlington		24			
	Walpole		8		8	
	Wallingford		12			
	Charlestown		6			
6.	Walpole		8			
	Charlotte		25			
	Windsor		20			
	Boston		15			
	Hartford		30			
	Northampton		8			
	Pittsfield		10			
9.	Windsor		44			
	Boston		30			

Page from eighteenth-century Brattleboro post office ledger listing price due and Post Office location.

Did You Know?

"Brattleboro has particular reason to be interested in postage stamps for ours was one of the first postoffices in the whole North American continent to issue a postage stamp, in 1846. Indeed, a genuine cancelled specimen of Brattleboro's first stamp... is valued, I understand, at \$1200 or more. [2019 value \$250,000] The initials it bears, F.N.P., are those of the local postmaster, Dr. Frederick N. Palmer (1845-1848), who in the second year of his incumbency hit upon the idea of printing such a stamp for his own convenience and that of his patrons for prepaid letters -- a full year before the United States government undertook to issue stamps." (Excerpt from January 4, 1930 Brattleboro Reformer)

Neighborhoods: Homestead/Horton

Drive along Canal Street, from the corner of Washington Street toward Main Street, and you're in the Homestead & Horton Historic District. The buildings on the right side are among some of those erected between 1840 and 1906 by prominent people of the day. Not all the houses in the Historic District are visible from Canal Street, others nestle on both sides of Horton and Homestead Places, one-way U-shaped streets leading through a quiet back water of closely packed, often multi-story, buildings.

This area is an example of a late 19th century residential neighborhood and played a part in transforming Brattleboro from a village to an urban center. Many of the buildings housed the expanding work force of the Estey Organ Company, but not everyone worked for Estey. Over time, more single and multiple family homes were constructed, providing housing for workers in manufacturing plants in the downtown area. *(All photos Lyssa Papazian, National Register of Historic Places, 2009)*

-Carol Farrington



162 Canal Street is the 'Original Estey Homestead'. Built in the Greek Revival style in 1852, it was the home of Jacob and Desdemona Estey, of Estey Organ fame. At one time the elder Esteys shared the house with their daughter and son-in-law, Abbie and Levi Fuller. The younger generation lived here until they built their own elaborate home known as Pine Heights on property further south on Canal Street. The building has been altered somewhat but still retains most of its original style.



Andrew J. Horton, Superintendent at the Brattleboro Gas Works built (in 1896) and lived at 176 Canal Street. He originally owned another house at the same location and moved it to another location on his property to make space for this new house. At the same time Mr. Horton converted his barn into a tenement. There are several references to different locations around town which Mr. Horton owned, but the larger portion of his land holdings was on Canal Street. In 1899 Mrs. Horton died unexpectedly. Mr. Horton and his family lived here between 1901 and 1909.

170 Canal Street is an example of the Shingle/Colonial Revival style, showing off the elaborate shingled roof. Albert W. Rockwell, a partner in the carriage making business of Rockwell and Sherwin, erected this building in 1906. Mr. Rockwell and his family lived here at what was then 86 Canal Street. Although there are few mentions of Mr. Rockwell in the old issues of the Brattleboro Reformer, his wife must have been a great one for entertaining as her name is mentioned over 200 times in the local column of that paper between 1894 and 1946.



152 Canal Street is an example of Queen Ann Style popular in the late 1800s and was reportedly built by or for Orin D. Stowell. Stowell worked for Dunham Brothers Shoes. The land on which 146, 152, 176 Canal Street and 25 Homestead Place sit was originally part of the large Estey Estate which encompassed the entire property from Washington Street to Canal Street School.



The last house of this Queen Ann style is located at 25 Homestead Place. After being lived in by Wilson E. Combs, it later became the home of Mr. and Mrs. Demetrius Latchis. The picture clearly shows the details which are indicative of the Queen Ann style; notice the elaborate decorations around the porch edges. In order to build some of the new houses, original smaller homes were moved to the back of the site, a common practice, becoming houses now situated on Horton Place and Homestead Place.





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Do You Need a Couple of Instant Ancestors?



We have become inundated with "Instant Ancestor" cabinet cards. These beautiful photos are non-Brattleboro or unidentified portraits of someone's ancestors. Some have quirky facial expressions, unusual hair styles and all have period clothing. Come up to the BHS Research Room in the Municipal Center and browse through them. If you see some you like, we are selling them for \$2.00 each. You could renew your membership while you are here! Hope to see you soon!