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History Center and Museum

Temporarily closed
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Newsletter compiled by:

Lee Ha

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Message from BHS President-Joe Rivers

The Trustees of the Historical Society hope this newsletter finds you in good health and spirits. These challenging times have caused us to alter the way we interact with the public. Because of COVID-19 we have not re-opened our Museum and History Center in the Masonic Lodge on Main Street. Volunteers continue to work on the displays and we look forward to a time when the public can visit Brattleboro's artifacts again.

The Research Room in the Municipal Center is also closed to the public. In late April the Town of Brattleboro issued a protocol for resumption of public activities in the building and we are following those guidelines. Volunteers continue to work in the office, but we are not presently set up to welcome visitors. Volunteers monitor our e-mail, create this newsletter, conduct research inquiries, post to our Facebook page, record the WTSA radio show, write weekly articles for the Brattleboro

Reformer, post our weekly podcasts on Soundcloud, maintain the Beal House, and process mail, acquisitions and donations.

In 1918 the flu epidemic lasted for over six months. There was no vaccine to protect against the virus and no antibiotics to treat the resulting bacterial infections like pneumonia. Strategies promoted by the Red Cross to combat the illness were quarantine, good personal hygiene, and limited public gatherings.

At a time when Brattleboro's population was about 8,000 people there were over 800 cases of influenza recorded by local health authorities. Approximately 40 people in Brattleboro succumbed to the flu, or the resulting pneumonia. As COVID-19 continues to impact the world we look forward to the day when we may once again open our doors to the public. In the meantime, please check with our website or Facebook page concerning possible re-opening dates. ☞

-Joe Rivers

History Beneath the River-Island Park

Robert Cornellier has been a member of the Brattleboro Vermont Water Rescue team since 2000. He has been diving in the Connecticut River at Brattleboro for years and is often in BHS Research Room investigating his findings. Here are a few of his findings under the river on the road to Hinsdale, NH.

The silt is constantly moving. What was exposed one year could be buried the next, artifacts not seen before emerge.

Steel bridge: The last bridge taken out by an ice flow in 1929 is resting upside down with the deck on top, but still spanning the width of the river. The power of water can be seen in that the large steel beams are bent and twisted like tin foil. The bridge lies from 6' to 30' below the surface. Large cross support beams are in



Cross support from the bridge washed out in 1929. (Robert Cornellier, c. 2006)

See Beneath River on page 2

Beneath River from page 1

front of the structure and a connecting pin and nut used for the deck was exposed recently to show pristine edges on the nut. Each year parts of the bridge not seen before are exposed while other parts are covered in silt.

Early wooden bridges: Large pieces of the covered bridge line the banks of the island including an arched section. Recently a 20' section of the deck was exposed lying about 35' below the surface. The worn wagon tracks can be seen on the deck. The stone pier located in the center of the early wooden bridge lies on its side at 40' in the middle of the river.

Steel from temporary bridges is scattered around the bottom.

Corvair: There is a Corvair that sits in 25' of water just North of the existing bridge. The car missed the sharp turn and plunged into the river after going down the bank. Frame, motor, steering wheel and seat frames remain. Some seasons the whole car can be exposed or sometimes just the upper part can be seen.

Pedestal piers from the pavilion: A set of piers that were part of the Island Park Pavilion are off the corner of what is left of the island. There is an inner set in shallow water and an outer set around 15' to 20' below the surface.

Iron Flat Car: A fully intact small iron flat car that was used for the railroad is off the west side, south of the bridge. One just like it sat on the rails in Vernon next to Route 142.

Dump site: South of the bridge behind Barrows on the west side of the river was once a dump site. Many artifacts have been found there. Bottles, utensils, dinnerware, toys, old wooden wheels, plumbing fixtures, brick and mortar, etc. as well as remnants of a large chandelier. Many years ago, an easy way to get rid of large unwanted items was to haul them out onto the ice in the winter and watch them disappear in the spring.



Part of the bridge washed out in 1929. (Photo: Robert Cornellier, 2006)

Team of horses in their tack: During a dive call while conducting a search a team of horses in their tack was found north of the bridge. Unfortunately, after going back and searching at a later time we were not able to locate them again, even after several attempts. I have searched records and have not found any

information on a team of horses going through the ice.

The area around the island is one of my favorite dive sites. Due to the changes in the river bottom, something new can always be seen. 🐾

-Robert Cornellier



Large beams of one of several bridges. (Photo: Robert Cornellier, 2006)

Is That a Carpenter Organ at Estey Organ Museum?

Though the Estey Organ Museum was closed for the early months of the pandemic, it has since reopened and many activities have continued, both on site and virtually.

Perhaps the most exciting event of the summer so far was the arrival at the museum of a playable Carpenter organ. (Both BHS and EOM have Carpenters in their collections, but none playable.) E.P. Carpenter manufactured more than 126,000 reed organs in a six-story building on Flat Street from the early 1880s until 1917. The company exhibited at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 (Estey did too), where Carpenter was also a judge in the musical instrument department.

The organ was donated to the museum by Charlie and Pam Robison, active members and officials of the Reed Organ Society, who delivered it from Missouri to Brattleboro. You can see and hear a video of Pam playing the organ on YouTube if you search for "Brattleboro Waltz and More." The Robisons also donated an image of the Carpenter organ exhibit at the

World's Fair showing this exact model on display.

The Estey museum opened to the public in August, with limited hours and virus-related restrictions. Information and a schedule are posted on the EOM website. The first official visitor of the season was a church organist from upstate New York who spent an hour and a half playing all the organs, including the Carpenter.

Other Estey projects are in the works, at the museum and online. Two volunteers are meeting twice a week to continue the cleaning of the pipe organ archives begun last summer. Another is creating a guided tour of the museum, to be accessed on smart phones. With advice from statewide experts, a team is beginning a project to put all the reed organ catalogs online.

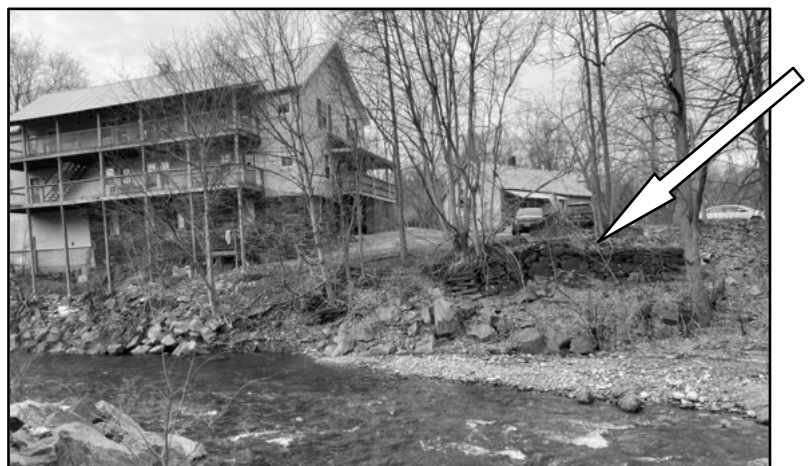
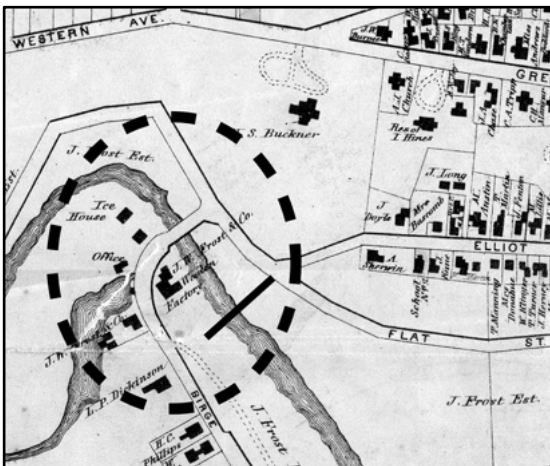
The Estey museum isn't heated and closes for the season in mid-October. So please come visit soon to try out the wonderful new (to us) Carpenter organ, made in Brattleboro more than 100 years ago! ♪

-Barbara George



No, it's not an Estey. This ornate reed organ was made in Brattleboro by the E.P. Carpenter Company in the 1890s and came home last month. (Photo: Charlie Robison, 2020)

Bits of History: Old Bridge Abutment



Until 1879 crossing the Whetstone Brook to Birge Street took travelers through Thomasville or Sawdust Alley noted by dotted circle on map above. In leafless seasons one can see what is probably the remnants of the abutment of that old bridge seen from Williams Street (marked on photograph). Today we use the Elliot Street bridge to cross the Whetstone, noted by solid black bar on map. (L: Photo: Lee Ha, 2020 R: Beers Atlas Map 1869) ♪

C.E. Allen Helps Build Oak Grove Neighborhood

Charles Edwin Allen was born in 1847 to a dairy farmer, George Allen and his wife Emma Maria (Hodge) Allen. The Allen family lived at the southern end of Canal Street, which was then considered out of town on Guilford Road. The Allen farm stretched throughout the current Oak Grove neighborhood.

At age 16, young Charles planted a patch of strawberries in hopes of selling them for a profit and the following summer he had indeed made \$70. Seeing a future for himself at that young age and over only a few years, he single-handedly built greenhouses, installing the heating systems himself.

He was entirely self-taught and his market-gardening business became a nationally known seedsman and florist operation.

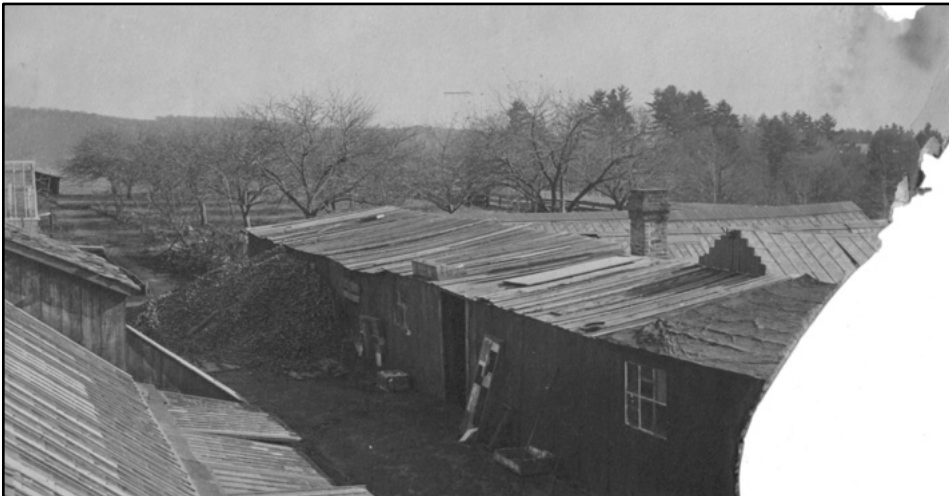
Allen also began making cement blocks around the turn of the century, first for himself, later to sell. He turned his focus to building several homes on his extensive land and selling lots, beginning to develop the area we know as Oak Grove neighborhood.

Together with several other abutting land owners, he sold large pieces of his land to two development companies, each company went on to build much needed homes for employees in Brattleboro's rapidly

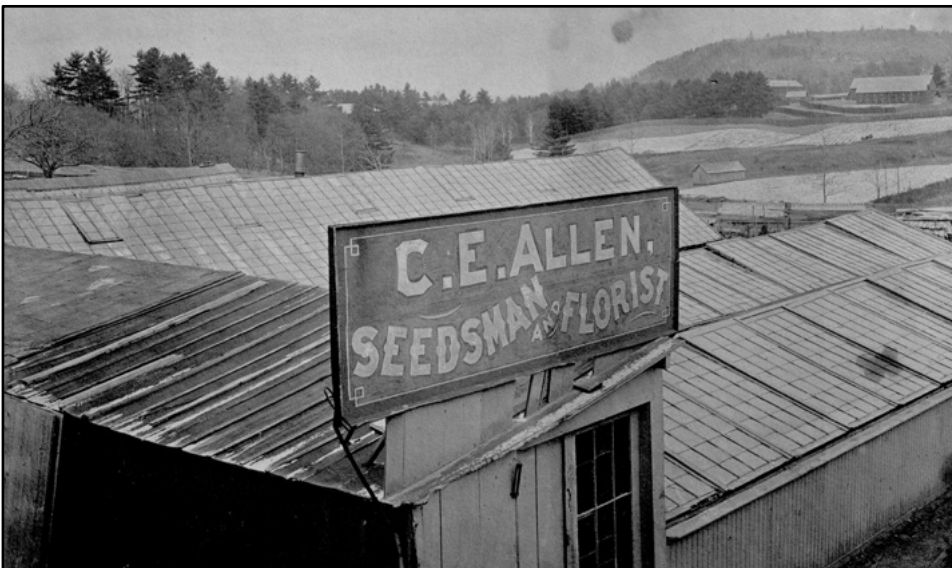
growing industries. He sold his very successful market gardening business, greenhouses, production buildings, house and a parcel of land in 1920 while continuing to build and sell homes and lots on his remaining land. He built himself a home on the southern corner of Clark Avenue and Canal Street, which was the last home in which he lived.

Charles E. Allen died in 1924, only a few months following his wife's death. His daughter Florence sold the remaining land for house lots. ♪

-Lee Ha



This image is reproduced from a damaged glass plate, near the intersection of Clark Avenue and Canal Street, facing east. In the late 1800s when this photograph was taken, one would have seen the production buildings, hothouses and orchards beyond. Today from the same spot, one sees Clark Avenue lined with homes dating from approximately 1910s and 20s. (BHS Benjamin Crown Photo Collection, c. 1890)



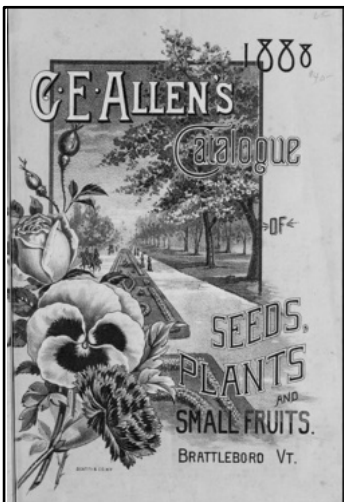
Near the corner of Clark Avenue and Canal Street, facing southeast. Orchards and vegetables fields lie between the greenhouses and the Valley Fair buildings, distant far right. This land was still considered out of town, with no residential development. The Valley Fair land is the site of the current Brattleboro Union High School, (BHS Benjamin Crown Photo Collection, c. 1890)



Although distorted and exaggerated, this was the basic layout of C. E. Allen's business early on. Interesting to note the long driveway leading to the greenhouses. Today one can still see the curb cut into the sidewalk where the driveway lay. The main house is still standing, currently # 382 Canal Street. (H.W. Burgett & Co., Historical Atlas of the State of Vermont, 1876) Note: See Then and Now on page 9 for yet another C.E. Allen building.

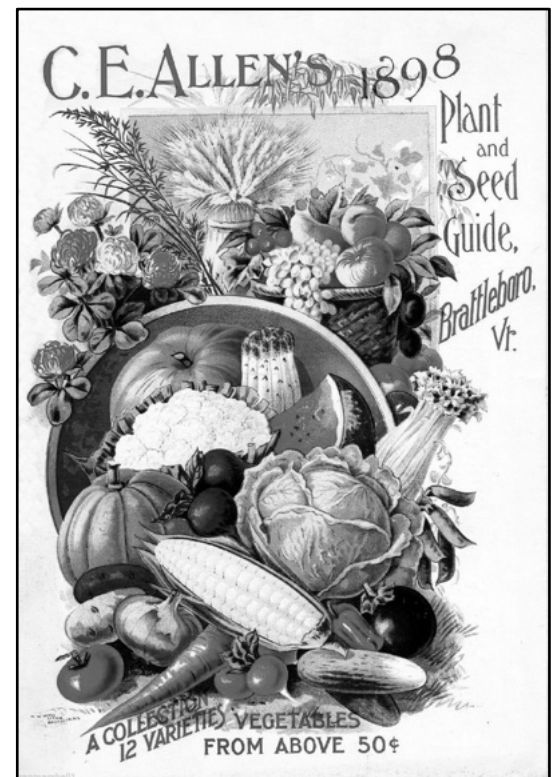


Left: Charles E. Allen (L) and his nephew Benjamin Crown (R) in one of the many hothouses where the current Oak Grove neighborhood lies today. (Photo: Benjamin Crown, c. 1880s)



Left: Allen produced an annual seed and plant catalogue which included detailed descriptions and directions for growing anything in his catalogue. Its publication was so anticipated each year that it was announced in the local newspaper.

Right: This full color 1898 catalogue cover is available today as a reprint poster, and also appears in a jigsaw puzzle of antique seed catalogue covers. It's even available as a needlepoint pattern!





1949: The Central Station fire alarm equipment. "...the instrument that transmits box alarm signals to the audible alarm mechanism. Telephone alarm calls are also set up on this instrument for transmission." This new equipment was supplied by the Superior American Fire Alarm and Signal Company at a cost of \$13,300. (Lewis R. Brown, 1949)



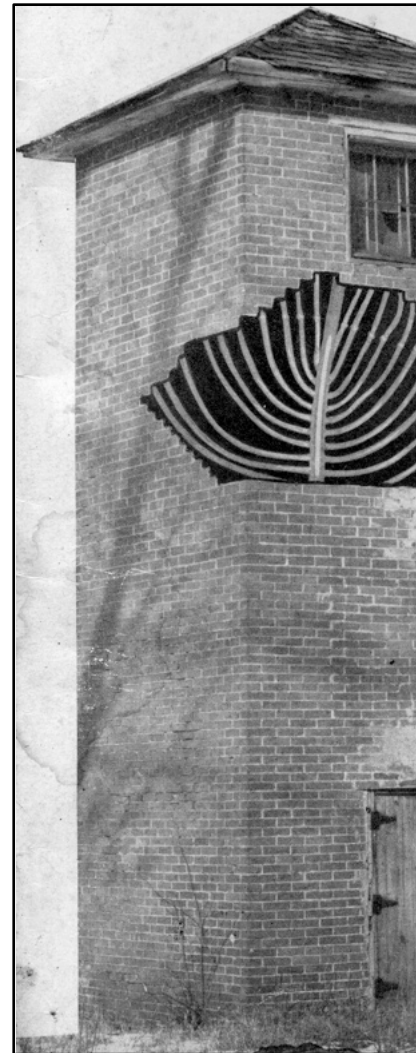
Distributing cement on Grove Street soil-cement project

1954: After realizing that the roads could no longer handle another layer of surfacing because the road level was above sidewalks, the town experimented with cement. They broke up and removed many inches of surface material, placed Portland Cement bags at one-half bag per square yard, then mixed it with 6 inches of underlying soil. After it was compacted, a layer of sealant was added. They did not know if it was viable in southern Vermont, but would await a cycle of seasons to see how it worked. By 1955 they were using cement on other roads in town, so it must have taken more than one year to see that cement was inappropriate this far north. (Photographer unknown, 1954)

Scanning Proj

At times volunteers take a break from Brattleboro Reformer negatives and move to Brattleboro gave us a box full of Auditors' wonderful booklets detailing the projects and highway improvements, police and fire department reports, recreation, library and even proud. In some cases, once a project was completed, people making use of the project, such as the report of the financial well-being of the town department.

Details abound and it is surprising how 100 page booklets about the history of Brattleboro



1954: This is the cover of the 1954 such as this stood in neighborhood supplied water to whomever became obviously had a more up-to-date, date unknown)

ect Continues

om scanning our tens of 1000s of
o other much smaller projects. The town of
Reports from 1926-1969, which are
ound town including such things as road/
artment updates, social welfare and health
special events for which the town might be
mplete, a photograph was included of
e community swimming pool. It's not only a
n but also a bit of bragging from every

how much information is chocked into these
leboro. ♪

-Lee Ha



4 Auditor's Report. Water towers
ds around town for years and
me a shareholder. By 1954 the town
townwide supply. (Photographer and



1957: High Street needed to be widened, the sewer moved and buried, and this retaining wall added. An expensive budget item for 1957, the wall is still a familiar sight on High Street Hill. (Photographer unknown, 1957)



1958: "The Community Center program provided a solid array of activities from mid-September to late April for all age groups." Included were such activities as dances, ice skating at Crystal Springs, doll carriage parade, dog obedience classes, freckle counting day, story-telling, arts and crafts, men's basketball and so much more. They even held a hola hoop event in the current parking lot of Biben's Ace Hardware. (Photographer unknown, 1958)

Lindenhurst: Impressive Mansion Long-gone

A grand estate once sat high atop Green Street Hill in the southeast corner of what is now known as Crowell Park. Through the years there were many owners and names, but when purchased and renovated in 1888 by George Crowell, it became known as "Lindenhurst."

The mansion was a showplace of beauty and craftsmanship. It had thirty-seven rooms, two towers, and a broad piazza (porch) wrapped around three sides. A central stained-glass

dome hung over a massive ornate oak staircase that rose through the center of the house.

From the back, the estate overlooked Elliot and Canal Streets, and in front, facing Green and High St. was a long drive bordered by trees on each side. (Today, if you stand in the right place you can still see that drive and perfect sweep of trees.)

It's a rare treat to read about these old estates through the eyes of those who lived in them as children,

when a porch was a perfect roller skating rink, the cellar a scary dungeon and a cut-glass tumbler too heavy for little hands.

A letter from Annabelle Nichols (Mrs. James Nelson, Jr.) recalls a lovely childhood at "Lindenhurst" with her caretaker father, after the Crowell family had moved away. The following are her memories of the estate. ♡

-Patti Griffin

Annabelle Nichols reminisces:

"Living 14 years in a house I have many memories! There was a tower, with winding (frightening to me then) stairs leading up to it, an all colored glass tower! My dad used to have to shovel the roofs every snow storm, which meant that we had to climb those stairs. He'd tie a safety rope and I'd stand there watching him. The inside of the main house reminds me of the southern home in 'Gone with the Wind' - I think that is why I enjoyed the movie so, it reminded me of Lindenhurst.

"When we moved there the house was furnished, almost completely – about the only things not there were linens. I shall never forget the huge butler's pantry, the rows and rows of cut glass – and pewter and serving sets. We used to use the cut glass tumblers, they were so heavy for a little girl to lift, and whenever I was invited to a friends house for supper it was a delight to lift a thin water glass instead of those heavy kinds I had at home – oh what I'd do today to have a table set with cut glass!

"The rooms were very elaborate – each bedroom had it's own private bath, and a room about 9 feet by 10 feet, with two tubs, one a regular tub and shower, and then a foot tub. Each bedroom had a dressing room, too. Each room would be of different wood.



The grand Lindenhurst, Green/High Street (BHS Postcard Collection, c. 1900)

If a room were of cherry, it had a cherry bedroom set and a cherry dressing room, if it were birds-eye the furniture was birds-eye.

"The fireplaces were huge and very beautiful – would take up one wall of a room, would have recessed reading booths on the sides of some of them.

"The ceiling of the lobby downstairs was all carved pieces of woods.

"It is a shame it could not have been saved, for I have as yet never been inside of in all my travels a home like it.

"We lived in the servants wing,

12 huge rooms. I remember the fun we had in the kitchen, there was a huge walk-in-refrigerator, and outside was a flight of stairs with a big door where the iceman would put the big cakes of ice – of course we never used this; it was where I had a playhouse in the summer, and in the winter I used the lower part.

"I was always afraid of the cellar; it was so huge, and so many rooms in it. The huge boiler room had a cat-like walk to it, and to get to the root cellar I had to pass this.

"The big porch that circled it was my roller skating rink. The garden

that seemed to hold millions of butterflies every summer was I imagine a real thing of beauty when the Crowells lived there for there were many peonies, and roses and iris still there when I was a child.

"The furniture was priceless. Mr. Crowell, the son, used to come at different times and take pieces away in a truck. They even left the desks and drawers full of stuff. I used to sit and look at the National Geographics and all the wonderful volumes of books in the library, and had many a pleasant day going through bureau drawers! People used to break in and take things; this is why my father was asked by the bank to live there rent free so that it would not become complete shambles in time. We also used to have to take prospective buyers through the house when the bank was trying to sell it. I do not know who bought and tore it down, we were so upset at having to leave it." 🐾



Lindhurst's large wrap around piazza, once a peaceful place to spend the afternoon and later a child's skating rink, now Lindhurst is the location of a town park. (BHS Postcard Collection, c. 1900)

Did You Know?

The Lindhurst property located at the top of High Street and Green Street was one of several locations under consideration for our new High School in the mid-1940s? The current location on Fairground Road won out.

Then and Now



C.E. Allen Seedsman and Florist building, or possibly his house. An unusual building of the time, it is distinguished by the ornate architectural adornments and vertical siding. (Photo: BHS Benjamin Crown Photo collection, c.1880s)



In 2020 C.E. Allen's building still stands. Notice the adornment at the peak of the roof under the eaves and the unusual shallow pitch of the roof. Many other renovations have been made and the building now houses Brattleboro's Walk-in Clinic and private residential space. 191 Clark Avenue. (Photo: Lee Ha, 2020)

Family Donates Large Ernest W. Gibson Collection

Brattleboro Historical Society has received a gift of Ernest W. Gibson family memorabilia from Grace Gibson Newcomer of Westport Point, MA, daughter of the late Judge Ernest and Dorothy Switzer Gibson and known to family and Brattleboro friends as Gay. She appears to have become the Gibson family historian.

The name Gibson is remembered as one of the most prominent and influential - political and public families in Vermont during the 20th century as leaders of the liberal wing of the Republican party. Three successive generations were known by the name Ernest W. Gibson although their middle names were different. The first was Ernest Willard Gibson (1871-1940) who served in the Vermont Senate from Windham County before being elected U.S. Congressman and then U.S. Senator from Vermont where he served until his death in 1940. His son, Ernest William Gibson, Jr. (1901-1969) was appointed by Governor Aiken to succeed him. Ernest, Jr., went on to be elected

Governor of Vermont in 1946 and then was appointed United States District Judge for the District of Vermont. The third generation was Ernest Willard

Gibson III (1927-2020) who was elected Representative from Brattleboro to the Vermont Legislature and later served as a Superior Judge and a Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court. His two brothers, Robert Hadley Gibson and David Alan Gibson, also held Vermont public offices.

Included in Gay's gift are some items of early clothing, such as the wedding dress of her grandmother, Grace Fullerton Hadley of Chester, to the senior Ernest Willard Gibson in 1895 or 96.

The collection of ephemera includes Gay's chart of the Gibson family tree as well as her helpful notes and many files of documents, newspaper articles, journals, letters and copies of speeches. Also there is a large number of handsome studio family photographs.

BHS is pleased and honored to have these personal memorabilia of a local family who long played an active role in our community as well as in the history of Vermont. ☞

-John H. Carnahan



Three generations E.W. Gibson Family. Left to right: Ernest Willard Gibson, Ernest William Gibson, Jr., Ernest Willard Gibson III. Photo: Lewis R. Brown, c. 1936

Donations From You!

Donations have still been coming in, although we are not open. But before we were closed for the Covid-19 virus we received a framed 90th Anniversary proclamation for Brattleboro AAUW from BHS board member Karen Davis, and Thompson School of Nursing nurses cape, cap, pins and I.D. card from Terese Hinkel of Shelburne Falls, MA.

A.J. McDonald gave us a street railroad ticket book, and Jody Normandeau donated a box of 1950 color slides taken by Ella Hunt. The

front page of the Brattleboro Reformer from Dec. 8, 1941 headlining the start of the War with Japan was given by Thomas Aiksnoras and Ruth Lane gave us a large batch of miscellaneous photos of Brattleboro.

An advertising booklet from DeWitt Grocers titled "On Getting On" came in from James Lahar of Ipswich MA, and a copy of the 1984 Brattleboro 'Informer' from April Fools' Day came from Stuart Copans of Brattleboro. An aerial Photo of Brattleboro and the 1884 Windham

County Gazetteer from Susan Lipsio and Heather Brown were also donated.

We received a souvenir folder of Brattleboro images from Linda Citron in Palmdale California, and a Rifle Club plaque from the 1930s was left outside our door by an unknown patron. Mary Mastaler Gray of Sutton VT sent us 12 1950s photographs of the dump on Vernon Street. Thank you to all for remembering us when coming across Brattleboro artifacts and ephemera! ☞

Levi Fuller – Governor, Inventor and Sketch Artist

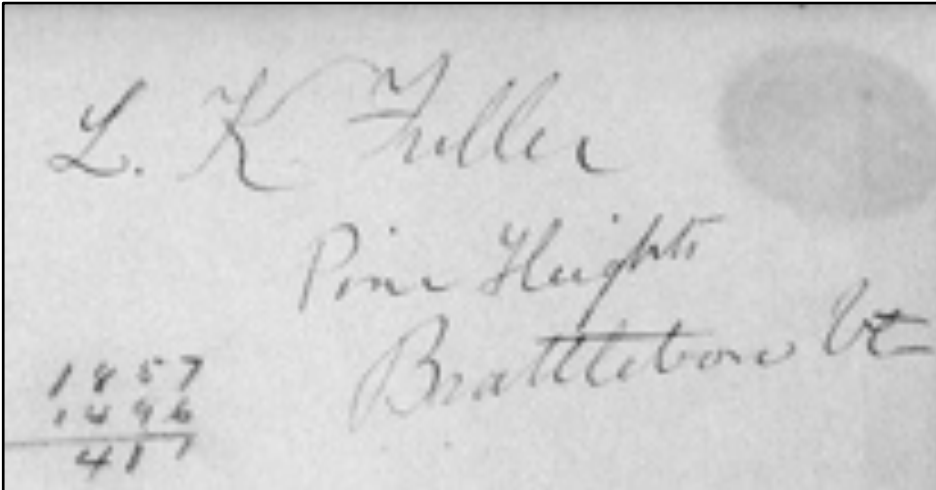
People who know about the history of the Estey Organ Company are familiar with the name of Levi Knight Fuller. He was an important figure in Brattleboro, working for Estey, and was awarded many patents for devices dealing with organ manufacturing.

But did you know that he was an artist?

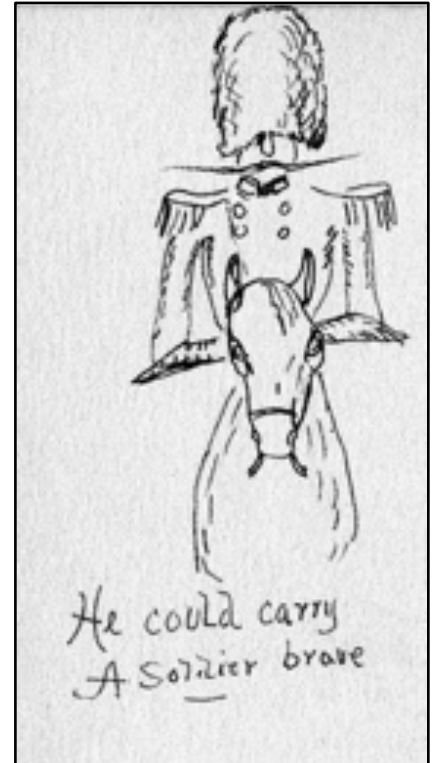
Among the artifacts belonging to the Brattleboro Historical Society, is a small brown-covered notebook with his name written inside the front cover. Drawings in this little notebook are of organ cabinets, and other images which look like parts used either in an organ or in their manufacture.

Who knew that Governor Levi Knight Fuller had such talent? ♪

-Carol Farrington



Above: The notebook looks as though someone dropped an oily substance on it and used the blank space to make a very incorrect calculation.



Above: And just look at the soldier's mustache in the drawing of the horse. Makes him look like a Cossack; with his furry helmet properly erect on his head, his uniform adorned with buttons and epaulets, sitting up straight, shoulders down, with his arms properly bent at the elbows and his hands close together.



Above: This drawing looks amazingly like one of the photographs in the Historical Society picture file. Was it an attempt at a self-portrait?



Above: Among the images are several of an unnamed woman. Do we dare to wonder who she was?



Left: He drew not only images of people but animals as well, including this group of deer. It is thought that groupings of 3 images are very pleasing; in animals or in flowers. Note how the three deer make a triangle shape, too.



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Did Valley Fair Contribute to 1918 Flu?



From 1886-1930s Brattleboro's Valley Fair was a much anticipated late summer activity for people both near and far. The fair had something for everyone: agricultural exhibits, daredevils, music, parades, horse racing and even airplanes. But for two years, 1916 and 1917, the Valley Fair was quite understandably shut down to prevent the continued spread of infantile paralysis (polio virus). It resumed in 1918, but perhaps the flu pandemic of that year would have been diminished if the fair had been cancelled for just one more year? (BHS Benjamin Crown Collection, 1906)