

SUMMER 2021

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Patricia Griffin

Daniel Guadalupe

Lee Ha

Bill Holiday

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Reggie Martell

Joe Rivers

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Newsletter:

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Brattleboro Words Trail Partners with BHS on Summer Exhibits and Events

If you haven't experienced the Brattleboro Words Trail and listened to its community-created audio stories about people and places important to the of 'word' history of Brattleboro, please do! You can also pick up a free Words Trail map and see the unique and beautiful clay-carved Downtown and Windham County murals depicting over 100 sites on the Trail.

This unique 'deep mapping' of our town involved scores of community members, from local writers and scholars to Joe Rivers' students at the Brattleboro Area Middle School and other local schools. All of whom researched and contributed their voices to the Trail. Their stories illuminate places associated with everyone from Nobel Laureates Saul

Bellow (gravesite) to lesser-known indigenous figures like William Apess, author of the first native autobiography book Son of the Forest. A new Green Street School plaque marks Jody Williams Peace Prize.

The Trail reveals historical firsts and other little known gems. Who knew Fredrick Douglass gave his first speech on Lincoln's assassination in Brattleboro, or that the first popular American translations of Rumi — still one of the world's best-selling poets — were published here? Listen to learn more!

Visit the BrattleboroWords.org site to download the Brattleboro Words

see *Summer Exhibits* page 2

Neighborhoods: Welcome to Esteyville

It is safe to say that Esteyville, south of Estey Organ Company, is Brattleboro's most planned neighborhood, the boundaries of which can be debated. Some references include the Austine School Campus on Maple Street, Fairview Street and even Brattleboro Memorial Hospital. However large or small one views Esteyville, no one can deny it was an important part of Brattleboro's growth. It has been referenced for its exceptional

company connections and remained a tight knit and proud neighborhood for many, many years.

Esteyville was born out of tragedies which struck Jacob Estey's Organ Company. After floods, near financial ruin, and fires, Jacob Estey, in 1870, bought the Dickinson Pasture and Rufus Clark farm and moved from his downtown location.

This land stretched from Birge Street south

see *Esteyville* page 4



Estey Organ Company with Esteyville in the background to right. (BHS photo collection, c. 1890)

— *Summer Exhibits from page 1*

Trail app to 'tour' the 45 story sites downtown. Or hit the road to visit 56 other sites associated with stories about, for instance: Chesterfield's Madame Sherri (the power of a good story!) Marlboro's Tasha Tudor, Newfane's Archer Mayor or John Kenneth Galbraith, Putney's John Humphrey Noyes or John Irving, or Dummerston's Kipling or Tom Bodett to name just a few. Or listen on your computer at home by simply searching "Brattleboro Words Trail" and explore from your couch!

BHS's Joe Rivers and Reggie Martell worked hard with other project leaders from the Brattleboro Literary Festival, Brooks Memorial Library, Write Action, and Marlboro College to conceive of the Trail project in 2016.

Thereby winning support from the National Endowment for the Humanities to launch the Trail — still a work in progress — this May. Local artist Cynthia Parker Houghton hand-carved the exquisite ceramic murals from which we printed the Brattleboro Words Trail maps. These maps feature

many Abenaki place names alongside modern ones in recognition of the continued Native American presence here.

The murals will be on display all summer at 118 Elliot St. gallery across from the fire station. The Historical Society will continue to partner with the Words Trail project on exhibits and events to engage the public with the Trail and its many stories.

"In harnessing its community's creativity to tell the diverse and entertaining stories that make this town a nationally significant literary hub, the Brattleboro Words Trail is an exceptional resource and attraction for tourists and locals alike, offering multiple destinations around an intriguing central theme for those who seek a unique Vermont experience."

—Heather Pelham, Vermont Commissioner of Tourism and Marketing

On Friday, July 2 Gallery Walk, an exhibit on WW1 Nurse Marion McCune Rice's photos and letters will open. You can listen to her audio story while family members reflect on the lives of the influential Rice family on Chestnut Hill. The Historical Society's giant Sanborn floor

map of 19th century Brattleboro, Marion's nurse uniform, and other artifacts will also be exhibited.

On Friday August 6, another exhibit focusing on Brattleboro journalism and print and publishing history, will open with a lively panel discussion. We will focus on "The State of the Fourth Estate" and the role of local journalism today followed by a reception with local journalists.

The BHS/Words Project partnership also produced the richly illustrated and delightful book Print Town: Brattleboro's Legacy of Words which just had its second printing. Copies are once again available at Everyone's Books. We will also be selling copies at the exhibits.

The Brattleboro Words Trail will keep creating audio stories and adding sites from its new perch at the Vermont

Folklife Center, where Joe's students will continue their participation in the "Words" Project. Community members are encouraged to contribute too by contacting BrattleboroWords@gmail.com. ☞

—Lissa Weinmann, BHS member and Director, Brattleboro Words Project

Then and Now



Intersection of Estey and Pleasant Streets. Part of Fuller Park is seen at right. For more about Esteyville see "Neighborhoods: Welcome to Esteyville" on pages 1, 4-5. (BHS Postcard collection, c. 1910)



Estey Street is paved and the sidewalk was lost to widening the street on Fuller Park side, but otherwise the houses remain much unchanged. (Lee Ha, 2021)

Florence Switzer: Brattleboro's Lady Cabbie

Scrapbooks are some of the most unique and personal items in our collection. While browsing through one of them, given to the Society in 2001 by Richard Reilly, I found clippings of local events. In particular a page containing this article's headline in a story from the November, 1953 "Lifetime Living Magazine". The piece was about Mrs. Florence B. Switzer and how she became a cab driver. So, who was she?

Florence Belle (Sargent) Switzer was born in Brattleboro in 1877. She lived with her family in Wilmington for a while, returned to Brattleboro and married Bernard M. D. Switzer. She had two children, then was divorced in 1914. While driving through town one day, she decided to take up a new career as a cab driver, unlikely choice for a woman in 1925.

Why did she do this? She lived alone, she liked to drive, and she liked people. Florence began by offering transportation to her friends – taking them to appointments, shopping trips, and the occasional spin in the country. In April of 1926, she even began advertising in the Brattleboro Reformer.

Before becoming a cab driver, she was active in several local organizations, including the Women's Relief Corp of the Grand Army of the Republic and the Dennis Rebekah Lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows. She appears to have taken part in the famous 1912 Brattleboro Pageant which celebrated 200 years of local history. A lady of many talents, she made and sold hand-braided rugs and crocheted items.

But Florence was happiest while driving people around town. If she did not have a passenger, she would call out to people on the street — especially women carrying heavy loads of shopping — trying to entice them to make use of her services. She must have been successful as she wore out 16 different cars over the course of her



Florence Switzer, long time Brattleboro cab driver ("Lifetime Living Magazine," November, 1953)

career, the first one a Model T Ford.

One item of interest appeared in the Brattleboro Reformer issue of August 26, 1942. During WWII, rubber was rationed and individuals had to apply for permission to purchase retread tires as rubber was reserved for the war effort. Florence was able to purchase 2 retreads and 1 inner tube. She was probably considered an "essential worker" at the time.

In the source article she claimed she had never had a car accident but reports in the Brattleboro Reformer say otherwise. In 1939 she was involved in an accident on Elliot St., in 1948, an accident on Canal St. and in 1951, an accident at the intersection of Main and High Streets, causing minor damage to her brand-new Pontiac cab. On May 11, 1951, she struck a parked car on Grove St., resulting in the suspension of her driver's license. Florence was aged 73 at that time. Later that year there was a report that she would not renew her taxi driver's license, but as her driver's license had been reinstated, she

continued driving.

Over the years she moved several times; from 13 Canal Street to 80 Green Street with her elderly mother, then to 13 Cedar Street, and finally to 402 Western Avenue, where she lived for the remainder of her life with her daughter and grandson.

Florence B. Switzer died in December 1959 at the age of 82, leaving a son, Roy B. Switzer; a daughter, Hazel F. Rhicard; three grandchildren (LeVerne Switzer, Mrs. Donald Rhicard Mitchell, and Clinton Rhicard), and seven great-grandchildren.

A note on our scrapbook collection: All of these fascinating books, in various sizes, were put together by individuals, some containing information on a single topic but most filled with snippets of things that interested that individual. It's amazing to see the range of items that intrigued our friends and neighbors over the years. ♡

— Carol Farrington

— *Esteyville from page 1*

and west for 60 acres to what is now Maple Street. To build his Birge Street factory, Estey had to remove 3 buildings. Two brick buildings were moved further west on Birge Street while the wooden house was dismantled and much of the wood was used in building a new house on Pleasant Street. His new slate-sided factory buildings on Birge Street were well above the flood line and the slate protected them somewhat from fire, disasters he was all too familiar with.

The large factory attracted many workers and Estey wanted to offer his workers safe and affordable housing. His unique idea was not to build company owned tenements for his workers, but to sell them building lots to build their own homes and thus take pride in their neighborhood. The first streets laid out were Estey, Cottage, and Organ Streets (the Estey Cottage Organ was their best selling organ at that time). The original map shows Estey and Organ Streets where they are today, and Cottage Street running parallel between them. Realizing there was not enough room for Cottage Street, it was later laid from Estey Street to Maple. Chestnut,

Pleasant, and Vine streets were added as were Cherry and Southern Avenue.

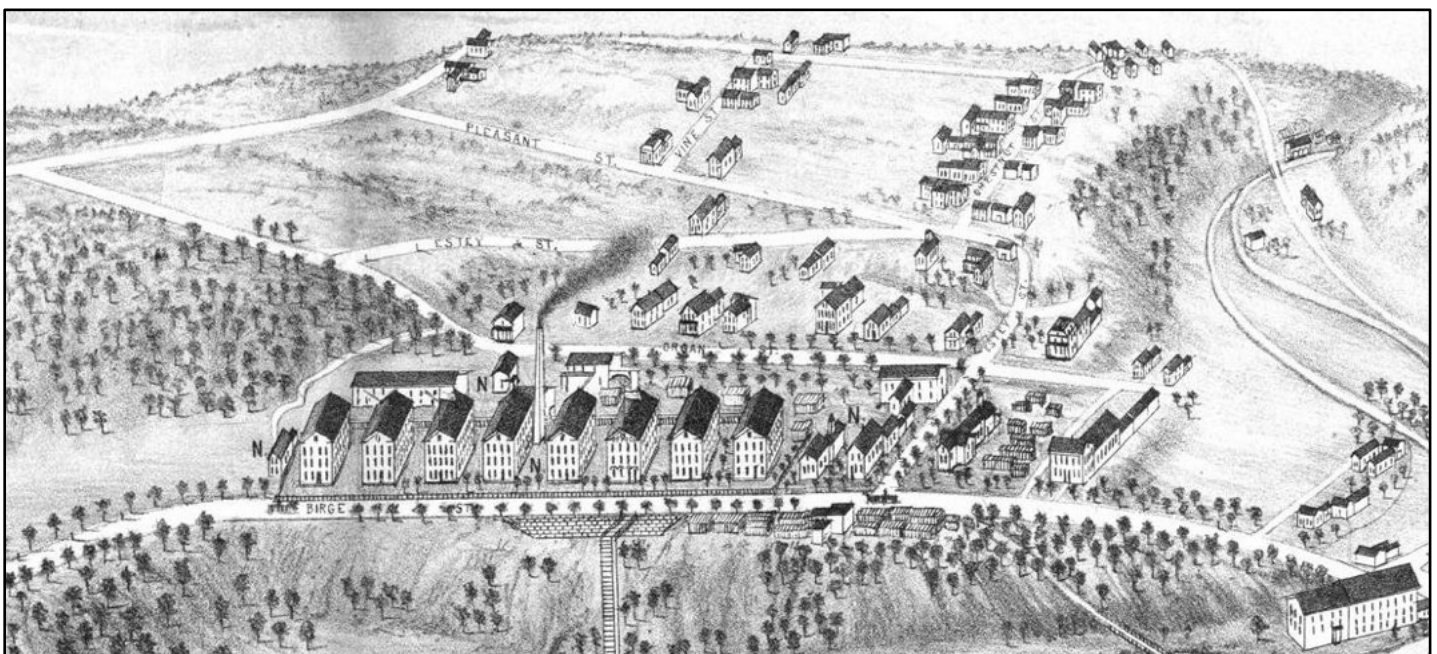
House lots were of good size, enough for a one and a half to two story home and in many cases a barn and a garden. Estey did not only sell lots to his employees, but to anyone who wanted to buy them. However, he did offer to hold the mortgages of his employees if needed. And so the new

neighborhood began to grow.

It took very little time for the rapidly growing community to feel the need of a school and thus Esteyville school was built in 1872 at the top of Estey Street hill. In 1888 it was moved back to give the children a larger play area in front, as well as create a basement for the school, due to the sloping land. This basement became an



The earliest known photo of the Ladies Enterprise Society, June 13, 1906 taken at Mrs. E.A. Foster's home on the corner of Estey and Organ Streets. These women took it upon themselves to help care for the sick or injured in Esteyville, to raise funds to build and keep up the bandstand as well as help to keep Esteyville a cohesive neighborhood for many years. (BHS LES Photo collection, 1906)



Estey Organ Company and Esteyville (cropped from H.H. Bailey & J.C. Hazen 1876 Brattleboro map)

important meeting place for many events in Esteyville.

Levi Fuller, closely connected with Estey Organ Co., lived for a few years in the house that now occupies the middle of Estey Circle. At the time it was called "The Pines." He later built a much grander home called "Pine Heights" on the east side of Canal Street. Fuller donated a triangular piece of property to Esteyville, bound on 2 sides by Estey and Pleasant Streets (at the time it was the geographic center of Esteyville) and it is known as Fuller Park. For years this was where everything from band concerts to picnics, neighborhood kickball games to fund raisers happened. Levi Fuller's brother, George, built a grand home (see photo right) which still stands today, although now divided into apartments.

People who lived on or walked down Organ Street, directly south of and up the hill from Estey Organ factory, were often graced with beautiful sounds coming from tuning or testing the organs. But Esteyville was also cursed with sooty black smoke from the smoke stacks of the factory. The smoke was the bane of every housewife who hung her laundry out to dry.

The fact that many of the people worked together and lived within proximity of each other certainly contributed to the cohesiveness of the neighborhood, but it was the very active and strong Ladies Enterprise Society (LES) that took the neighborhood to a different level. Formed in 1888 the members of this charitable organization would meet monthly or biweekly in members homes, at Fuller Park or in the meeting room in the basement of Esteyville School to discuss ways to bring residents of Esteyville together. After their meetings they would have supper and socialize, no doubt this was also a much anticipated 'ladies only' night out. These dedicated ladies from all parts of Esteyville sponsored band concerts (the



George Fuller's house. Although not the typical 1.5/2 story home which lined the streets of Esteyville, George Fuller's home stood proudly on Estey Street hill. (BHS Stereo Card collection, 1870s)

Esteyville band was popular), supplied ice cream, cake and donuts, made quilts to donate and held raffles and rummage sales to raise money for neighborhood projects. Their energies went to residents of Esteyville who were in need; the sick or injured or those who had had a death in the family. Birthdays or anniversaries were also acknowledged. Baskets of food, meals, cards or flowers would appear on a neighbor's doorstep. These women were also responsible for taking care of Fuller Park and in 1913 they raised money to build the bandstand that occupies Fuller Park to this day. (See page 8)

Esteyville became a town within a town. Two stores had most everything one needed, one on Chestnut Street and one on the corner of Chestnut and Pleasant Streets. They had their own school, a church (built in 1894/5 on Cottage Street), their own baseball team, band, fire department and the Ladies Enterprise Society.

It was only after World War II that things changed. The cookouts and socials on Fuller Park happened less

frequently even though the LES was still together. Through the 1950s, Estey Organ Co. faced a changing market and poor management. Try as they might to continue, the factory closed its doors in 1960. The LES continued to meet and hold gatherings through the mid 1970s and even formed the Junior Branch of the Society with hopes of attracting younger women to keep it going. Our records show that the society struggled with membership during the 1970s and all our information about them ends in 1977.

However, there was one last triumphant LES Esteyville gathering at Fuller Park during the bicentennial in 1976. Many neighbors enjoyed the celebration and a flagpole was erected in front of the bandstand. (see page 8)

Today, the bandstand and flagpole as well as Fuller Park and the the Organ factory buildings down the hill are a legacy left of Brattleboro's Esteyville, a well planned and tight knit neighborhood, a place so many Estey Organ Company employees called home. ☞

— Lee Ha

Scanning

Our scanning project continues with color slides. We scanned them and added them to our ever growing collection. The images take us back to 1950s Brattleboro which was a more peaceful. Jody Normandeau donated these.



The Creamery Bridge has not moved and remains much the same but the surrounding land and road certainly have. Trees mostly obscure the houses on Western Avenue and the new Citizens' Bridge lies to the east keeping the old Creamery Bridge for posterity.



"The Colonial Apartments" on the corner of High and Oak Street as it appeared in the 1950s, built in 1903 by C.O. Robbins. Described in a 1904 Vermont Phoenix article as having a roof of cedar shingles tinted dark green, the house was a lighter shade of green with trim of white. Apartments on the first floor had square parlors with red velvet wall coverings and draperies made with dotted Swiss muslin. A music room with window seats, and a dining room rounded out that floor. Walking up the mahogany staircase to the second floor, one found similar apartments and 3 bathrooms as well. The annex to the servants quarters was also on the 2nd floor. The 3rd floor had a children's playroom and there were hardwood floors and white metal ceilings throughout.



Approaching Brattleboro from the west. Street heading north to the left, the avenue to the right. The house close to the street on the north side has a porch that is now enclosed, while the ivy on the house has since been cleared of ivy.



East side of Main Street hill with the building that was of Goodnow, Pearson & Hunt. The building is part of the American Building.

g Project

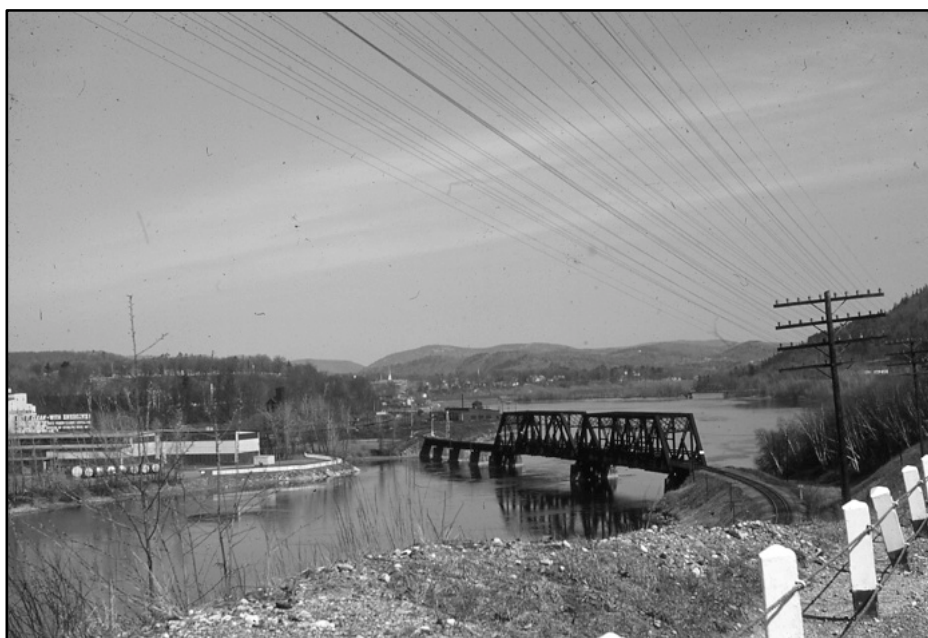
of Brattleboro once belonging to Ella Hunt. Growing digital collection. Beautifully exposed, when roads were a bit less busy and life seemed slides in 2020.



st on Western Avenue with Forest
venue has a calmer feel than today.
orth side remains nearly the same but
y covered brick house just beyond



dings as the main attraction here. Ella
Store fame, located on the ground floor



In the 1950s the railroad bridge across the Connecticut River was still in use. This image was taken from New Hampshire facing north looking up the river. On the Vermont side Crosby Mills is seen to far left and Brattleboro is in the distance, center. The bridge is still standing.



The buildings are the same but most stores have come and gone. Notice the church steeples still prominent today, and cars parked heading north are parallel while those heading south are parked at a diagonal. The ever changing banner across Main Street still lets us know what's happening in town to this day.

BHS Welcomes Returning Trustee Fran Lynggaard Hansen

Fran Lynggaard Hansen (formerly Frances Fairchild) grew up in Brattleboro and was always a fan of local history. When she was twelve years old, she started interviewing local people for her social studies papers at Oak Grove School. Years later, she would use a lot of that information for her column

"Downstreet" in the Brattleboro Reformer. Her columns were made into a book, Brattleboro, Historically Speaking.

Fran was a former member of the Historical Society before leaving town in 2012 on a ten year working odyssey that brought her to China where she stayed for three years, then

on to Egypt for a year, Kuwait for two years, Sudan and finally for three years in Armenia where she was principal of an international elementary school in Yerevan. Covid-19 and a war in Armenia with Azerbaijan brought her home to Brattleboro in February this year. She's delighted to have joined the Board once again. ☞

What's New at Estey Organ Museum: Estey Factory Map Available

If the Esteyville article in this issue inspires you to take a walk in that historic neighborhood, why not continue down the hill and visit the Estey Organ factory?

The Estey Organ Museum is open Saturday afternoons from 2 to 4 pm, but you can explore the factory complex any time using the map brochure that the museum has printed. It can be found in a rack outside the museum entrance.

The map shows the site as it existed in the early 1900s, when

there were 28 individual structures, including dry kilns, a fire pump, a garage, and packing/shipping buildings. More than half of the buildings still exist and the brochure has text explaining the sequence and rationale of construction.

For greater detail go to the Sanborn maps available online at the Library of Congress website. The Estey complex is shown in 10 maps dating from 1885 to 1971 (the company was gone by then) with details of what was done on each

floor of every building.

Another way to experience the factory complex is through the Brattleboro Words Trail. In three podcasts of 5-6 minutes each you can learn about Estey history and the museum and listen to music played on organs built right there.

Enjoy your visit to this important site of Brattleboro's heritage. ☞

— Barbara George

Bits of History: Fuller Park Bandstand and Flagpole



Above and right: Besides the unusual 1913 bandstand on Fuller Park, between Pleasant and Estey Streets, a small flagpole no longer used stands in front. Set in cement in 1976 during a bicentennial celebration (right), L.E.S. is not someone's initials but the initials of an important Esteyville club called the Ladies Enterprise Society. Read all about it in on pages 1,4-5 "Neighborhoods: Welcome to Esteyville." (Lee Ha, 2021)

Would You Like to Help Keep Our History Safe and Alive?

Long-time and new members: you already have a love of Brattleboro history, so how about putting that passion into energy at the historical society research room?

We are a small group of volunteers who are dedicated to keeping Brattleboro history safe and accessible to anyone doing research or

who is just curious. Our list of jobs for volunteers is long and varied but here is just a sampling.

- add key words to digitized photos
- transcribe artifact inventories
- add photos to website
- design new exhibits
- process donated items
- organize and list framed objects

The list is truly unending.

From the mundane (we all do those tasks) to the exciting, there is something for you to help with. Stop in and see us (when the Municipal Center opens), or email us and we will be happy to answer your questions to get you started. ☞

Estey Advertising Cards

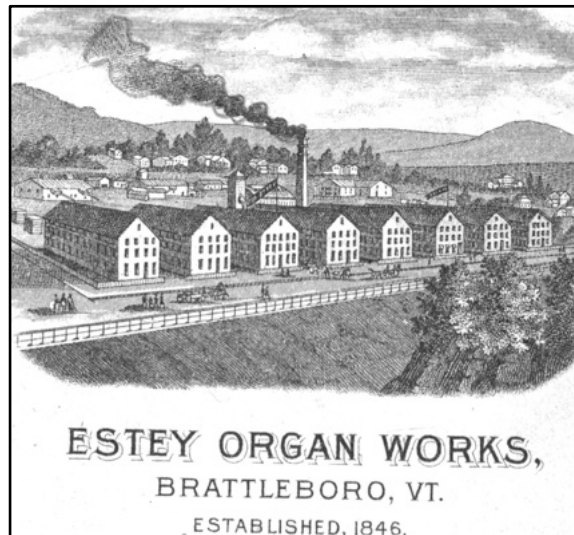
Estey produced many advertising trade cards over the years. On the reverse of several he included his beloved slate sided buildings and houses to the south in Esteyville.

BHS has a large binder of Brattleboro Victorian trade cards as well as postcards, matchbook covers, letterheads/envelopes and first day covers, not to mention thousands of

photographs, books, and a myriad of other items of interest to enjoy a trip down History Lane. Don't hesitate to drop by and browse our collections. ☞



In full color, this detailed Estey Organ advertising card also shows the factory in a framed picture on the wall. (BHS Victorian Trade Card collection, c.1890)



The back of an advertising card, Estey was sure to include the growing Esteyville in the background. (BHS Victorian Trade Card collection, c.1890)

Donations From You!

Donations from around the area continue to arrive. We have received Shumway family photographs and memorabilia from the 1920s from Judy Shumway of Centerville, MA; 1916 & 1933 Manning directories from Carolyn Mueller of Littleton, MA, and May 1883 "The Household" from Paul Baresel of Buxton, ME. Joanna Case of Mystic, CT gave us handwritten letters by Mary Foster Potter with transcripts included, and Kay Zaharis of Cortland,

ME sent us a Covey milk bottle cap.

A 1906 Brattleboro calendar came to us from the Bridport, VT Historical Society, and James Carten gave us a small 1948 ski jump photo. Parker Huber of Brattleboro gave us a large collection of Gallery Walk guides from 2000-2019 and the Dublin, NH Historical Society gave us a 1923 Chautauqua-Swarthmore program collection. We received the 1865 Volume III issues 1-50 of the "Vermont

Record" from Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, VA and several photographs from Terence Fitzgerald in Connecticut.

We received a large donation of ephemera from Richard Michelman and will highlight that in our upcoming winter newsletter, as well as many generous donations which have come to us in the last month. Thanks to all! ☞

The Chesterfield Suspension Bridge – 85 years later

The suspension bridge built over the Connecticut River in 1889 was the first bridge to connect Brattleboro's north end to New Hampshire. Previously people had to go south to Hinsdale to cross a toll bridge, take a 'ferry' across, or walk across the ice in the winter.

The bridge stood for 47 years until the flood of 1936 took it down. For the late 1800s it had been a fine structure, but as automobiles came into use and the Connecticut River's level

rose markedly due to the Vernon dam (built in 1912) the bridge became less useful, so perhaps its collapse was a blessing in disguise.

Per Bob Cornellier, BHS Trustee and dive team member, "The tower was located by sonar during a Brattleboro Fire department dive team training. We originally thought it was a boat but it had an odd shape. After some research I realized it was the washed away tower from the

Chesterfield side. The team went back and drove the location. It is amazing how powerful the flood was. The tower is still connected to its granite base 100 yards from its land location. A large part of the deck was found in the middle of the river with cable and some wood still connected."

Bob's underwater videos of the suspension bridge can be seen online at <https://youtu.be/3YPQB9oEvSU>

It is well worth a visit! 🌊



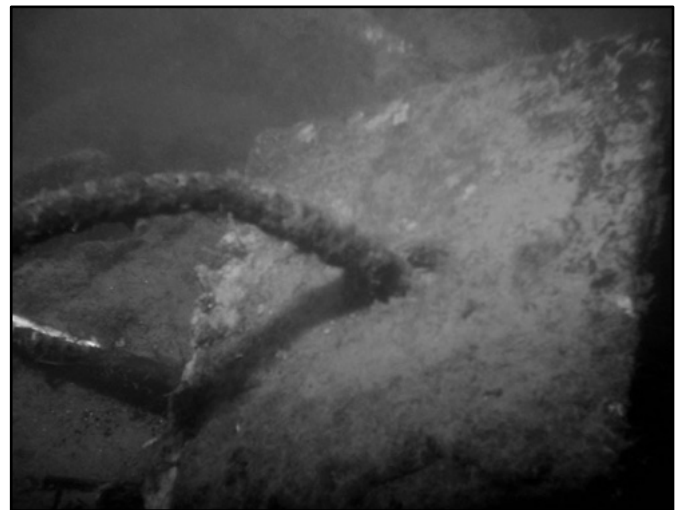
The Suspension bridge was a gorgeous bridge built for horse-drawn vehicles and before the Vernon Dam, note how narrow the river is. (BHS photo collection, 1906)



The suspension bridge collapsed into a raging river during the flood of 1936. Notice the difference in the width of the Connecticut River from the photo to the left. (BHS McVeigh photo collection, 1936)



Covered with silt and algae growth, cross work of the collapsed suspension bridge tower, submerged since 1936. (Photos: Robert Cornellier, 2012)



Suspension cable connected to the deck of the submerged bridge. (Photos: Robert Cornellier, 2012)

Give a Gift Membership!

Do you know someone who would like to learn more about Brattleboro's history? Give them a gift membership for a year!

Fill out the form below, cut it out, and

send it to us with your payment. We will include a card in the newsletter to your friend or family member letting them know you thought of them.

Our membership year is January 1

through December 31 and new members will receive this issue and the upcoming winter issue. ☞

Membership Categories

Lifetime: \$400

Sustaining: \$100

Business Donor: \$75

Contributing: \$50

Family: \$35

Individual: \$25

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Your name _____
(to include on card)

Recipient's name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____

State: _____

Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Mail to: Brattleboro Historical Society

230 Main Street, Suite #301

Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

Long-time BHS Member Corrects Us

In our last newsletter, we featured E. Crosby & Co. One of BHS members, John Hooper, is the great-x4 grandson of founder Edward Crosby, and he wrote to us to correct our error with Gold Medal Flour and General Mills.

"I thought," wrote John "that it was strange that our family lore and history made no mention of such a connection. Surely, we would have exercised our bragging rights down

through the generations." So, as the author of several articles in the recently published PRINT TOWN, he hoped to confirm these facts through research.

Alas, it turned out that E. Crosby & Co. was merely the Eastern Sales Agent for the midwest company that ultimately became General Mills in 1928. But it is easy to see where the confusion lay... that company's name was Washburn Crosby, located in Minneapolis, MN. "Our" Edward and

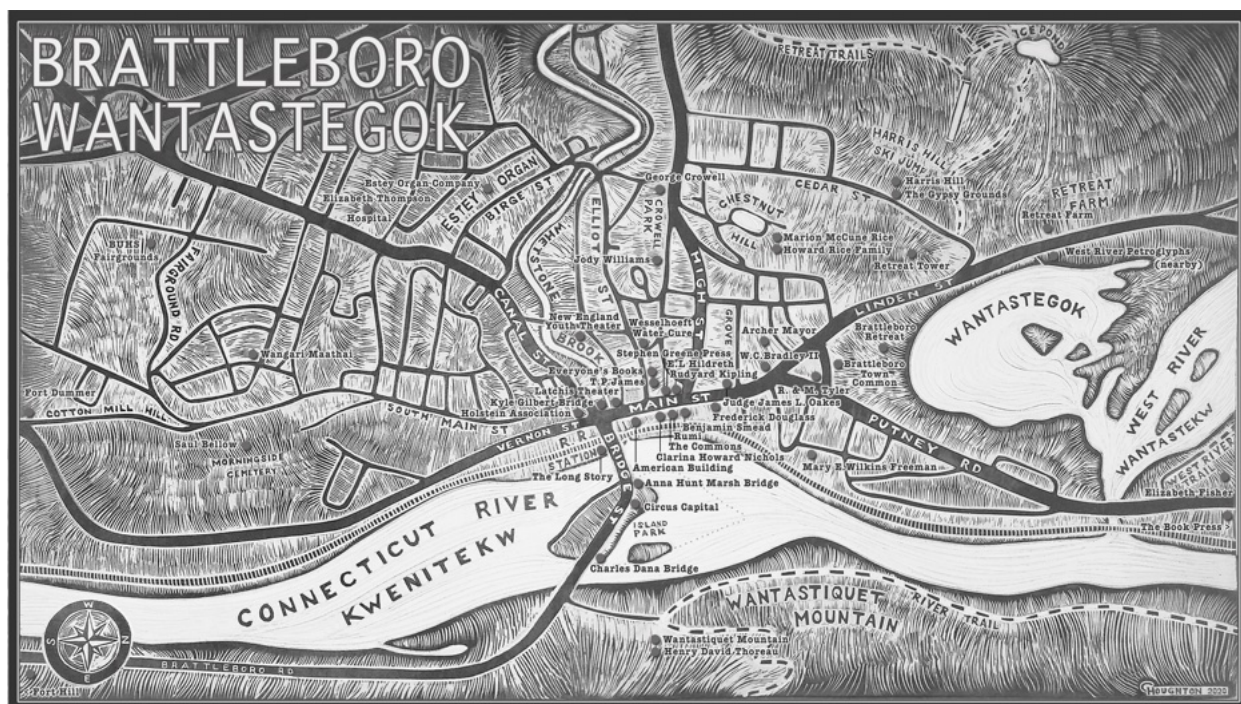
"their" John were of the same generation and may have had a common ancestor, being Simon Crosby who settled in the Colonies in 1635. And, it is possible Edward and John knew each other. Edward made an annual "trip West" to meet with the executives of the several mills for whom he was the Eastern Sales Agent. ☞



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This hand-carved mural depicts 45 sites with audio stories specific to the Downtown Brattleboro tour on the Brattleboro Words Trail. An additional 56 sites with stories are located around Windham County and in MA and NH using Brattleboro as a hub for regional exploration on bikes and cars. More sites will be added as the community continues to explore the rich vein of 'words' all around us. See page 1 & 2 for details. (Cynthia Parker Houghton, 2020)