



Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

June 2019

A Message From the Board President

The Johnson Historical Society continues to be an active participant in the life of the Town of Johnson. Our collection of historical items is ever expanding. There is something different to discover with each visit to the Holcomb House.

We have recently seen the retirement of two long serving members of our Board of Directors – Jane Marshall and Frank Dodge and the appointment of two new members – Kelly Vandorn and Mary Jean Smith. Thanks to all for your service.

Our periodic presentations have continued with the Vermont Studio Center talking about their master plan for their properties and Steve Leach talking about his years working for the railroad. There are more to come. These are most entertaining and informative.

Our presence at Tuesday Night Live will continue this summer; stop and see us for pie.

Please consider a visit to the Holcomb House to see what we have. We are open on Thursday mornings and Sunday afternoons.

Richard “Dick” Simays

The mission of the Johnson Historical Society is to preserve our history by weaving stories of the past with the present, using our collections of artifacts and displays, creating a legacy for future generations.

Raffle Tickets Available!



We will be raffling this beautiful painting from Georgia Balch.

Georgia Balch (1888-1981), born near Toronto, Canada, moved with her family to Johnson around the turn of the century. She attended Johnson High School, the Montpelier Seminary and the University of Vermont in Burlington, always studying painting. She lived in the big white house on Stearns Street (Rt 100c). Mrs. Balch often worked with the Jeffersonville group of artists, namely Emile Gruppe and Thomas Curtain. She painted outside in the warmer months and inside from her window in the

winter. You will find some of her artwork at the Johnson Historical Society.

To purchase a raffle ticket (\$10) please contact any of our board members. The framed painting (43”x36”) will be raffled on the last Tuesday Night Live in August.



Miniature Models

David Griswold, a former student of Johnson High School, class of 1959, has recently created two (2) additional amazing miniature buildings for our historical society's collection. The detail work put into these projects is remarkable. If you look closely, you will see tiny people and objects inside the buildings that also light up.

The original first graded Johnson School built in 1895 consisted of only the East wing for \$7,500. Later on a part of the building was used as a senior high. The first graduating class was in 1904 with 3 graduates. In 1908, the school included nine grades and the High School. Then in 1911 the West wing was built for \$6,000.



Johnson School (East Wing)



Johnson High School

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index, the equivalent in purchasing power of that dollar amount would be \$228,653.57 for the East wing and \$161,742.32 for the West wing today.



Johnson High School miniature by David Griswold



The Landmark, aka the Nye Block

The Landmark, known as the Nye Block is also part of our miniature collection. The original structure was built in 1869 but sadly burned down on July 23, 1986. The three story building that used to live on the corner of Main Street and Railroad Street was "one of the most elegant stores in the state outside of the cities" it was said in 1896.

It was believed that Johnson would be a junction of a railroad through Lowell to Newport, a dream which did not materialize, but the store served a large area and



Detail of The Nye Block miniature

functioned in lieu of a bank. A bedroom over the office safe had a large open grill and a clerk slept beside this grill with a loaded gun by his side through the night. The owner, Leonard Knight , was succeeded by W.H. Nye whose name is perpetuated in the name of the block.

Source: "History of Johnson Vermont" by Oread Literary Club Committee



The Nye Block miniature by David Griswold

Johnson School Houses

Before the Johnson School that we know of today was built, there were 17 school districts in Johnson itself. All around Johnson there were 12 operating school houses! This was because back then, transportation for the children was a big issue, therefore having many separate schools for them would make it easier for students to walk. The old buildings that are still standing, are now privately owned.



Johnson Elementary School in 2010



Christy School moved from Limlaw Farm in 1939

Some of these school houses are still here as of today. The Christy School, was one of them, closed in 1954. Another one is Railroad Street School, District #2, being called The Yellow School built in 1845. There was The Waterman School, District #8, destroyed by fire in 1979. The Swamp School, District #14, which the remains and foundation are still visible. Also, the Riverside School, District #1, off of Hogback Rd.

In 1895, the first public Johnson High School was constructed. Even though it was called a high school, elementary school students were taught downstairs, while the high school students were upstairs. The kindergarteners, were at the college, then would be moved to the downstairs of the school.



The Riverside School, closed in 1945

College students would come down to the elementary and high school and teach, and learn from there. Since then, the school has been remodeled with new additions.



The Hillside School, aka #9, closed in 1943

Information provided by Alice Whiting, former teacher at the graded Johnson School.



East Johnson School



Ober Hill School, closed in 1941

How can you help our local historical society?

Donating: we welcome monetary donations of any value. Please mail checks payable to Johnson Historical Society, P.O. Box 383, Johnson, VT 05656.

Volunteering: baking pies for our Tuesday Night Live tent, staffing the historical society building, sharing your genealogy research.

Hours

Dr. Holcomb House, home of the Johnson Historical Society is open every Sunday from 1 to 4 PM and every Thursday from 9 AM to noon. Also, opened by appointment, please call Linda Jones at 635-7401 or Lois Frey at 635-7826.

Board Meetings

We meet on the second Wednesday of every month at 9:00 am at Dr. Holcomb House on 188 Main Street. Open to public. To access our meeting minutes, please visit:



<http://townofjohnson.com/boards/historical-society/>

Board Officers

Dick Simays, President

Tom Carney, Vice President

Kelly Vandorn, Treasurer

Lois Frey, Secretary

Alice Whiting, Membership Chair