



**Team Inspection of Townshend's Stone Arch Bridges Oct 22, 2017. LtoR: Lee Petty (THS); James Duggan (VT Div Hist Pres); Andrew Snelling and Robert DeSiervo (Townshend Planning Commission); Charles Marchant (THS) and Lisa Ryan, Preservation Trust of VT**

## Grant Awarded for Stone Arch Bridges

The Preservation Trust of Vermont has awarded a matching grant for \$1,500 to fund a Conditions Assessment for Townshend's six historic stone arch bridges. This one-on-one grant will be matched by \$1,500 locally. A master mason, Michael Weitzner of Thistle Stone Works in Brattleboro, has been hired to do the assessment which he expects to begin in early Spring while the runoff is high. Weitzner's final report will list needed repairs, suggestions for how to make those repairs, and give an estimate of costs. The report will be used as the basis for drawing up a plan to preserve the bridges, which are historically significant links to Townshend's history.

In anticipation of restoration costs, the historical society has begun fundraising by selling Stone Arch Bridge jigsaw puzzles, and Aldro T. Hibbard prints. You can view these on our website ([www.townshendvt.org](http://www.townshendvt.org)), on our Facebook page, and at local shops and galleries. Contact us at [info@townshendvt.org](mailto:info@townshendvt.org) for more information.



## Builder of Townshend's Stone Arch Bridges

James Otis Follett was one of Townshend's extraordinary citizens; a farmer turned stone-mason, a skilled craftsman and an intuitive engineer.

Born in East Jamaica, Vermont, in 1843, Follett lived and worked all of his adult life on a farm in Townshend. As an active community member, he served as town road commissioner, was a deacon of the Congregational Church, and fought during the Civil War at the battle of Gettysburg.

According to town records, Follett built his first bridge in Townshend in 1894, and built at least 12 more in the town before his death in 1911. In addition to bridges, Follett also built piers, abutments for covered bridges, and building foundations in Townshend.

Follett had no formal education in engineering or masonry. Yet, he knew his craft well, for his bridges are both handsome and durable. Although several bridges have been washed out by floods or torn down, none has been known to fail structurally. And the bridges in use today now carry heavy truck traffic never imagined in Follett's day.

(SEE related story on bridge-builder, James Follett on page 3.)

## Welcome to our New President!

Welcome to Charlie Marchant as the new President of Townshend Historical Society. And much appreciation to our outgoing President, Robert DuGrenier who has served so faithfully for 14 years and will now continue on as Vice President. Following in Robert's footsteps, Charlie hopes we will make use of Scott Covered Bridge for additional historical society activities. Last year's re-dedication of the bridge and pot luck supper with square/contra dance was a great success. We're also considering the idea of having an information kiosk at the bridge with historical information about the bridge and Townshend.

At present, we're holding winter work sessions in our History Room. Projects in progress include file organization, library inventory, photo ID, and scanning. If anyone would like to help out at these sessions, please call Charlie at 365-7937 to find out the date and project planned for the next session.



**Walter Corcoran**

On October 26, 2017, Townshend Historical Society lost one of its most loyal supporters. Walter Corcoran of Townshend was the Treasurer of the Society for many years, but an even more important contribution was the enthusiasm he lent to any project. Walter was often the first to agree to take photos, chase down an important artifact or represent THS at historical events. Our community will miss him.

## Inside the Home

We invite you to participate in our project to photographically record the way people lived **inside** their homes. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, photographers typically emphasized house exteriors with families and favorite horses on the lawn. And while there were some interior shots for the rich and famous, very little record exists for the common man who probably didn't have the means for paying a photographer.

So, what we're trying to do is to save what we can of the early photos of our forebears, and to encourage present-day photos of the details of early house interiors.

You might want to think about the special features of your home --for example: a nice fireplace, a cistern, early pump and sink, the front door with interesting hardware, unusual trim around the doorways, a plain or fancy banister, and also family furniture and items that date back to the early days.

It would be so wonderful to have a photographic record of what your home looked like before modern-day redecoration. Maybe a "before-and-after" photo would be especially interesting. We're not thinking of "House Beautiful" or anything especially prideful, just interesting features of ordinary day-to-day living.

The following is an example:



**Parlor in the Hazelton, Sanderson House just before restoration.** (Note wallpaper removal at left.)

Contact Heidi Clawson at 802 874-4585 or [heidibackdoor2@gmail.com](mailto:heidibackdoor2@gmail.com) to share your ideas.





**Follett bridge with oxen in West Townshend**  
*Painted by Aldro T. Hibbard*

### **James Otis Follett: “Builder of Bridges and Men”**

The following story was told by *Grampa White* to Mary Gilbert Smith. “The Follett’s of Townshend made their pitch on a hill farm. When the white meetin’ house was put up, it was four miles away. But distance or weather made no difference in the Folletts going to meetin’.

Deacon Follett, fourth in the line, never missed a meetin’ Sunday or midweek. He was a thick-set man with a tawny beard and a voice that seemed to come from his boot heels. When he talked, folks were given to listening for if he talked, he had something to say.

Once on his way to town where he aimed to pay a bill to Jabez Worth, he met Jabe a-foot on the road. The deacon pulled up his horse, Jabez stopped and the deacon handed him the money. They bowed to each other, the deacon gathered up his reins and drove on without a word.

But when they had a church meetin’ to vote on buying some new hymnals, he did some talkin’. The other deacon wanted to buy some more of the same make so’s they could use what was left of the old ones in a pinch. Deacon Follett was on his feet right off.

‘When I buy a plow,’ he said, ‘I don’t ask for a mate to my old one. I aim to get the best plow on the market. I look around to see how good they’re

making ‘em. So in buying new hymnals shouldn’t we look around? We might find better ones than those we’ve been using!’

Deacon Follett was more than a farmer and a churchman. He raised a fine family of boys and he built the first stone arch bridge in town. He bid it in so cheap that he didn’t make any money on it, and he didn’t make much on the ones he built afterwards.

But he had the satisfaction of building a bridge that’s as strong today as the day he built it. He calculated that it gave room for two skittish horses to pass each other and two automobiles can if their drivers tend to business.

Men that had never seen a stone arch bridge thought the deacon’s wasn’t strong enough to hold and they didn’t hesitate to say so. So the day it was finished, the deacon had the biggest yoke of oxen in town on hand, hitched to a stone boat holding all the stone they could draw. He drove ‘em straight across the new bridge without sayin’ so much as a word.

After he went, some of the folks that used to know him put a bronze tablet on that bridge: ‘Erected to the memory of James Otis Follett: Able, Fearless, Godly; Builder of Bridges and Men.’ “

*(From a news clipping written around 1911)*

## **Self-Guided Maple Sugar Tour**

**March 24, 2018; 11am-4pm**  
 (Weather permitting.)

- #1 Taft Hill Farm, 1657 Back Windham Rd.
- #2 Meadows Bee Farm, 4980 Windham Hill Rd
- #3 Charlie Marchant, 961 Rte. 35 (Grafton Rd)
- #4 Mitchell Putnam, 555 Rte. 35 (Athens Rd)

**Maple Syrup Tasting; and Sugar  
 House Prints by Aldro T. Hibbard will  
 be on Sale at 20% off for the month  
 at  
 West Townshend Country Store**



Photo courtesy of Linda Sperry

## The Mystery Quilt

We have recently acquired an antique subscription quilt --simple in design with over 250 beautifully written signatures, one per triangle and the date, 1886, stitched on the plain back. The quilt had been purchased by a quilt store in CT whose owner was intrigued by all the signatures. Doing research on Ancestry.com, and with the help of about a dozen quilters over a period of two years, the quilt's connection to the Townshend Baptist Church became apparent. Subscription quilts were common in that era as a means of raising money for a cause, local or otherwise. Individuals or families would donate an amount to have their names written in one of the quilt squares.

The family names on the quilt are familiar ones in our town's history and present day, but for what cause might they be raising money? The best clue so far would be a comment in the book, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, by Abby M. Hemenway 1891 detailing the precarious financial state of Leland and Gray Seminary: "In 1886, through the efforts of Mr. E. J. Knapp, [Trustee] a fund of over \$11,000 was obtained for this school". If this narrative is true, where had the quilt been all these years? If your family has any information concerning the quilt, please contact THS. We are working on publishing a complete list of family names on the Historical Society's website.

### Townshend Historical Society Board

President: Charles Marchant  
 Vice President: Robert DuGrenier  
 Secretary: Marge Holt  
 Treasurer: Lee Petty  
 Trustees:  
 Heidi Clawson, Priscilla Lyman



P.O. Box 202, Townshend, VT 05353

## A Special Thank You to our 98 Members to date!

You make our mission possible.

- ◆ Member dues and gifts are key to our success.
- ◆ Member volunteers help with special events, office work, scanning, and photography.
- ◆ Members lend support to our projects and their participation is vital to obtaining grants.

**Help us reach our goal of 125 Members in 2018!**

**Please join now!**

Pay your dues on our website: click store button on [www.townshendvt.org](http://www.townshendvt.org), or by US MAIL