



# Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

October 2022

## A Message From the Board President

We are glad to be able to welcome folks back to the Holcomb House. We are open on the second and fourth Sundays.

We also just completed another successful summer of pie sales at Tuesday Night Live. Thanks to everyone who came for pie and/or hot dog. Thanks to all of our pie makers who make this activity a success.

We have a few special programs scheduled and we look forward to seeing all of you there.

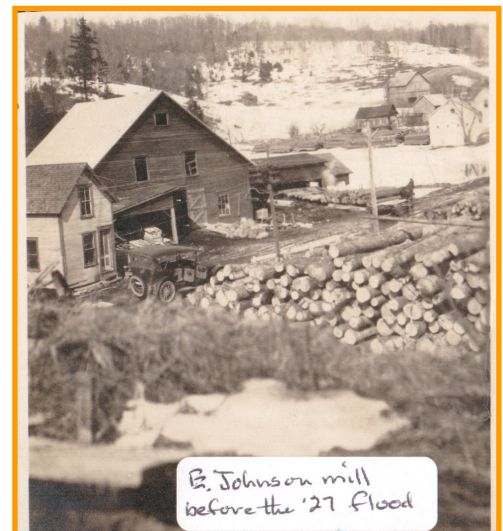
Dick Simays

## THE 95TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1927 FLOOD

Ninety-five years ago, November 3&4, 1927 disaster struck our beautiful state of Vermont. According to historical records the damage in Johnson was some of the greatest.

Following are excerpts from a letter written December 2, 1927 by Doris Stearns Johnson's Town Clerk in reply to Hazel Gifford Perkins who had written offering assistance.

Friday morning November 4 after the storm, the Sweet girls, (Dorothy Richards, Nellie Chase, Marion Grandy and Jack Sweet, their little brother), my brothers Robert and Karl and myself started out for work and the boys to school. Earlier that morning Richard DeMerritt came up on horseback and told us the little cement bridge at the foot of Sweet Hill (Hoag Road) was washed away and that we would have to go cross lots to the village. We were expecting this little bridge to go out early Thursday evening so left our work at



B. Johnson mill  
before the '27 flood

4 PM and made it home in our car.

Well, we went cross lots to the village and when we were back of East Johnson, we began to realize the havoc the water had made. The Parker and Stearns Water Mill would have washed away if the big tube that carries water to the Electric Light Plant had not held it. The Lumber Mill was also destroyed. The road in front of the mill was gullied out to the ledge about 5 or 6 feet under the road.



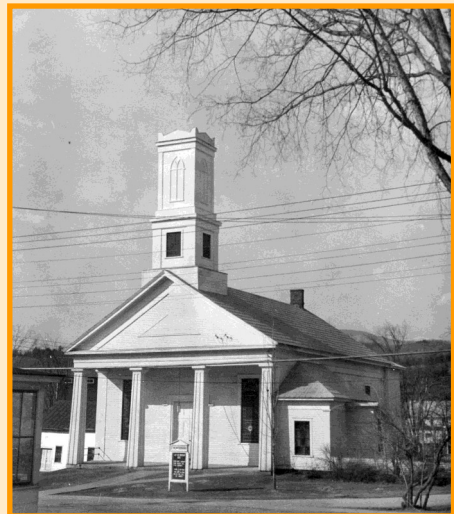
*Flood*



School street after water had gone down about 6 feet

We came down to the village over the hill back of the school house and the village was all afloat. The big bridge near the Power Plant (Power House Bridge) for some unknown reason held and was damaged little. The only way we could get to the village was to go through this bridge and we met Elmer Balch (Georgia Balch's father-in-law) who told us since 7 AM the water had gone down

two feet, it was then nearly 9 AM and the water was up over the steps in the school yard, nearly up to the Bang's house (Bob Herold's), up to Alice Scott's (Walter Pomroy's) and the Woolen Mill and Congregational Church on Main Street.



*Congregational Church*



*Sterling Trust Bank*

At the highest the water was up to within six inches of the top of the glass in the bank windows and the fourth stair down from my office.

The Peck house (now a Chinese restaurant East side of Beard's Hardware) was



submerged to the porch roof. All but three horses in Parker's barn drowned (brick house on Main Street with horse and carriage barn in back).

The Bishop store, now belonging to Mrs. C. W. Potter turned over twice, once toward Farrington's garage then back toward the Farrington house and finally settled back within six inches of the foundation. (From Main Street bridge East on right side of road the 2nd building was Bishop's store owned by Mrs. Potter and the 3rd building was the Farrington house.) The Potters were rescued by Warren Annis less than 5 minutes before the house turned over the first time.



*Second building Potter-Bishop Store and 3rd building Farrington house*

The Farrington house (Main Street), Dr. Scott's house (Railroad Street across from library), little house where Marvin Bourne used to live (Railroad Street-Buster Dezaine house), Ithemer Sweet house (Railroad Street-Roland Dubray house), Joe Lambert house (Lower Main West-Bernard Sheltra house), Lewis Lambert house (two houses down from Sheltra house), George Mills house, (Lower Main West-Walt Shattuck house), Delia Jones house (Main Street, 2nd house down from United Church) and many others were off their foundations. The ell and barn at Chauncy McCuin's (first

house after brick house on Main Street) was torn away.



*Joe Muzzy House*

The Atwell house (other side of road past Manchester's Mill), Ed Walker house (Lower Main Street West, last house on left before Lamoille river) and Joe Muzzy house (where Union Bank is now but closer to road) are completely washed away.

Mr. Thomas, his wife and 3 children together with one of the Normal School girls stayed in the attic of the Hayford house (Railroad Street-old Ken Neill house, large house behind library) with water up to the eaves all night expecting to be washed away any minute. They were taken out about 11AM Friday.

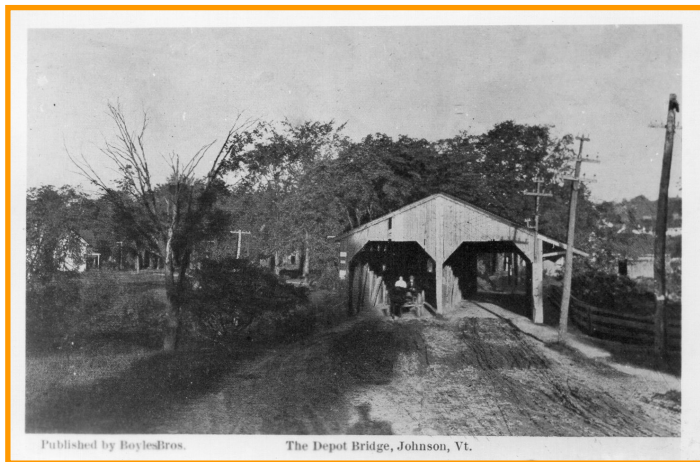


*French Covered Bridge Johnson*

All of the stores, the Woolen Mill and the library were washed badly.

We lost the big bridge near Phil French's, the Railroad Street bridge and a number of smaller bridges.

The farms outside suffered. Harry Rogers (East straight past the Mark Patch farm) turned his stock loose, took his baby less than a year old, his wife Marion and two boys and went up over the hill through the pasture to Fred Hopkins place (top of Grow Road) in the night. The Chapman's (Dogs Head side of Mark Patch farm) were taken out on a raft from the second story. The water came to the second floor of the Harry Stiles farm (now Laraway Youth and Family Services). Harry Newton (now Camille Lehouillier's) lost all his cows and barely escaped with his children.



*Depot Bridge*

Smith Davis (Ken Horner house across from Dollar General, no longer there) saved his family and stock but the Shangraw family, father, mother, and daughter who lived in the Scribner place (in field behind The Buggyman but before Moogs) were washed away with their house and drowned.



*Harry Newton Farm*



*Phil French Farm*

The Phil French farm (Edgar Audibert-first farm on left after bridge Route 15W) was badly wrecked, the barn moved from the foundation and up against the house and young Phil's bungalow (next door) was washed off its foundation.

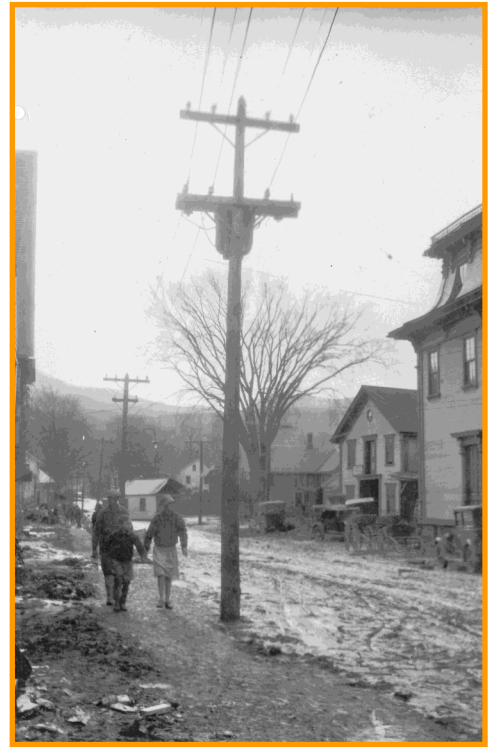


John Fowler (Railroad Street back of Nye Block) lost all his horses, the only thing he saved was a calf which he carried on his back up to the haymow.

Ned Holmes (Rhoda Sears) lost all his cows, 17 head believe, and his horses. His barns and garages were all wrecked and his silo full of silage turned over and smashed.



*Ned Holmes*



*John Fowler*



*Pearl Street Damage*

Warren Annis worked all night and most of the next day rescuing people with Buddy Lambert's small boat. He could only take two small people or one larger person at a time. Reddy Hooper (Franklin "Red") also worked with a canoe taking food and water to the people on Pearl Street who were marooned.

The hotel was full of guests and the street was lined with cars that were all covered with water. The people in the hotel had to go to the attic.

We had just built a new cement road from Nye's corner to the bridge near the station. Many people believe that all the houses on the right side of the cement



*Johnson Hotel*



street from the Nye Block down would have been swept away if this cement street had not kept the water from gulling under them. The street came through in wonderful condition considering the water and buildings that washed up and down it. The new sidewalks were ruined in places but came through better than one could believe possible.



*Depot Street*

Down at William E. Tracy's (brick house end of Railroad Street) the water took part of the ell off the house and dug a hole under the stone flagging and Bill's garage that he says will take more than 25 loads of good gravel to fill. Their cement drive was picked up bodily and placed on the other side of the street. So, there was some force to the current there.

You should see the place, Railroad Street is one mass of barns, garages, and broken furniture, etc. mixed in with the houses. Some of the houses that did not wash completely away are practically ruined. The library is a mess, I guess they had to shovel the books out. They were to have a big time there that Thursday night and it is lucky for the women of the town that the water came up early in the evening to prevent them going there or they would



*Doris Stearns*



*Village Flood Damage*

have been trapped with no way to escape. The water must have been up to the roof.

No one can possibly tell anyone that has not seen Johnson just how badly everything is wrecked and the mess the whole town is in.

Everyone is turning to and helping us get ready for winter. The next morning after the flood some of the school boys here walked to Hyde Park and before night the Legion men at Hyde Park came through afoot with packs of food. By Saturday when the roads had been temporarily fixed to Hyde Park they came and started Red Cross meals at the Town Hall.



*Town Hall*

Nearly every farmhouse and all of the houses on Stearns Street and Gulf Street were housing all the people from Railroad, Main, Lower Main and Pearl Streets. The people on the other side of the big bridge climbed French Hill and were safe but were short for food. Morrisville and Hyde Park served us meals for over two weeks. Now the trains come as far as Johnson from Cambridge, and we have temporary roads and bridges so that trucks are coming to our aid.



*Main Street Temporary Bridge*



Building new abutments

*Building Railroad Street Bridge*



*Temporary bridge near Phil French Farm*

Hazel: Thank you so much for offering to help us in our hour of need. As our people are getting dug out and back into their houses now they are finding that a lot of things that they were planning on for winter are ruined. If you can, without going short yourselves, spare them some clothing I believe that it would be greatly appreciated.

Very Sincerely Yours, Doris Stearns - Town Clerk



## ***Welcome Dennis Richards***

A third generation Johnsonite, Dennis Richards grew up being fascinated when his grandparents told stories of life in Johnson, many of which he still remembers. Dennis was inspired by the work of the Historical Society when the location was the Masonic Temple. At that time, he decided that once he retired from his work at Northern Vermont University-Johnson he would become an active participant with the group trying to preserve the town's history. Once he retired, he attended several meetings at the Historical Society's Board of Trustees and decided to apply for a position. On 20 June 2022, Dennis was appointed by the Selectboard to become a member of the Board of Trustees. He and his wife Mary often attend the Historical Society's Open House events and both participated at 2022 Tuesday Night Live, Dennis helping to grill the hot dogs and Mary serving slices of pie and cake throughout July and August. With his life experiences in Johnson, Dennis helps to make connections from the past and is helping to preserve our town's history.

### ***Board of Trustees***

Dick Simays, President  
Mary Jean Smith, Vice President  
Kelly Vandorn, Treasurer  
Lois Frey, Secretary  
Alice Whiting, Membership Chair  
Dennis Richards  
Linda Jones, Board Member

### ***Open Hours***

Second and Fourth Sunday of each month 1pm-3pm Or by appointment-call any board member

### ***Visit Our Website***

<https://johnsonhistoricalsociety.org/>

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