



Johnson Historical Society Newsletter

January 2022

Happy New Year! Hopefully this finds you and your family well. We at the Historical Society continue to meet during these Covid times to conduct any day to day business that may come along. We continue to look forward to when we can open the Holcomb House to visitors.

We have a vacancy on our Board of Directors and are always looking for folks to serve on our committees. If you are interested, please contact us.

Dick Simays, President

JOHNSON ACADEMY TO NORTHERN VERMONT UNIVERSITY - JOHNSON

During the early 19th century the youth of Johnson learned reading, writing and arithmetic in a one-room school house. It became apparent that there was a need for a more substantial educational facility. Unfortunately, Johnson did not have a building suitable to fill these needs or the money to acquire one.

John Chesamore, a local shoe maker donated his shop on Main Street, and also traveled on horseback to Chelsea and found a teacher, Dr. Carpenter. In 1828, Dr. Carpenter taught his first class of 16 students. This cobbler's shop, with its desks and benches, was adequate until 1830 when a simple two story clapboard box with belfry was constructed with funds from private subscription. It consisted of one large room below and one above. This building became known as Johnson Academy and was chartered as such on November 8, 1832. Pupils came from surrounding towns to receive the equivalent of a high school education since high schools were not available at that time.

The school became known as Lamoille County Grammar School in 1836 after the Vermont Legislature created Lamoille County.

By 1847, The Grammar School had outgrown its facility and a major renovation was necessary. Again, the funds for this renovation were raised by private subscription. The building was moved back 20 feet from the road. A new front with an entrance hall and a wide stairway leading to the upper floor was added.



Johnson Normal School

According to an 1852 catalog, these major renovations were necessary because of the steady increase of patronage. The student population reached 305 in 1852 and was increased to 496, if the summer session was included. The vestry of the nearby Congregational Church was used for some recitations and for chapel services.

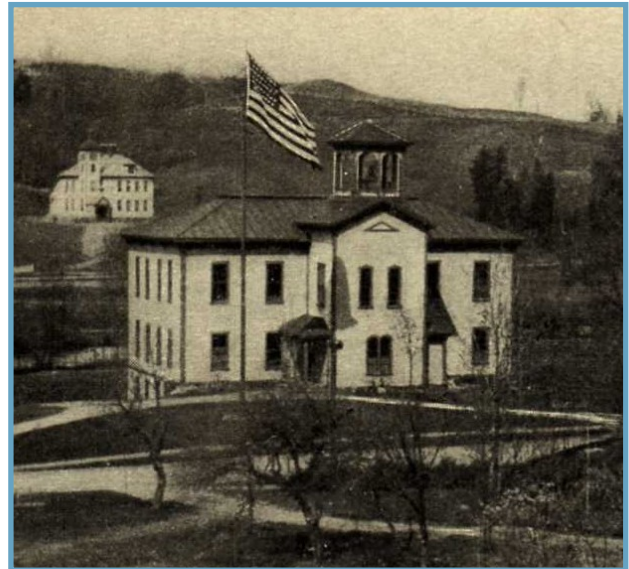
In 1863, S. H. Pearl became the head of the school. Mr. Pearl urged that Johnson should be recognized by the state legislature as a normal school. He worked toward this goal for three and a half years. In the year of 1866, the state gave the Board of Education the power to change certain academies and grammar schools to normal schools recognizing the importance of teacher training in Vermont. With this news, the citizens of Johnson began their preparations to provide for a normal school. A subscription list was started, as had been done in 1830. Residents who were not able to donate money often contributed work and/or materials. Public performances at the Town Hall, summer picnics and a July Strawberry Festival were held to raise money and all proceeds were donated to the Normal School. Another renovation was done nearly doubling the size of the building.

In 1867, Lamoille County Grammar surrendered its charter and became a State Normal School. Mr. S. H. Pearl was the last president of the Lamoille County Grammar School and the first president of the Johnson Normal School.

There was a mandate from the state to prepare students for teaching in Vermont's elementary schools with an introduction of a model school providing observation and practice teaching.

An 1886 catalog states: "Our course of study gives the student a thorough knowledge of the branches taught in public schools; a good degree of mental discipline; the theory of and the art of teaching."

The following is quoted from a 1905-1906 Vermont State Normal Schools Catalog. "From its beginning the school provided special instruction for the training of teachers: it thus ranks as one of the earliest institutions in the United States to maintain a Normal Department.



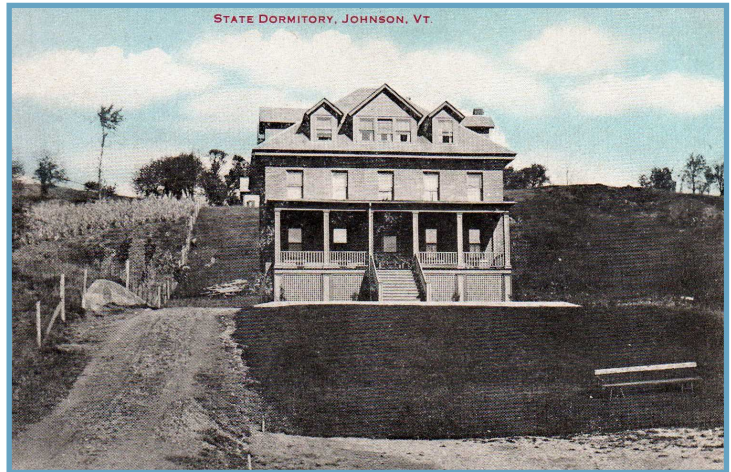
Normal School and Model School

Also quoted from the same catalog is the following: "It is the aim of the Johnson Normal School to anticipate the demands which are placed upon teachers in Vermont's school. By giving those who desire it a thorough training that will enable them to perform their work with faculty, adapt it to varying conditions, maintain a high standard in elementary education, awaken the enthusiasm of their pupils, and become influences for good in the communities where they take up their work."

Until 1909, Johnson Normal School offered a lower (first) course and a higher (second) course. The

first course at Johnson lasted two years and was open to pupils out of elementary school. Any student who completed the course would receive a teaching certificate which was valid for 5 years. The second course was open to any student who completed the first course. These graduates received a state certificate valid for 10 years.

In 1910, the Vermont Legislature appropriated \$12,000 to construct housing for students at JNS. A building was completed in 1913 and was known only as The Dormitory. It became known as Sterling Hall about 1929-1930.



Sterling Hall

After August 1, 1920, Johnson would no longer be sanctioned as a Normal School. In 1921, Charles H. Stearns, a graduate of the Normal School, advocated for the restoration of the normal schools. From 1921-1925, the school became known as Johnson Training School, reopening in 1925 as a normal school when the legislature reversed its earlier vote.



Community Gymnasium

In 1928-1929, The Community League of Johnson had a gymnasium built on Pearl Street. The athletic life at the Normal School increased and the school used the facility for both basketball and social functions, such as dances.

Another dormitory, first mentioned in a catalog from the years 1930-1931, Hill House, was located on the corner of Pearl and School Streets. The state leased the building and converted it to house 19 girls.

In 1931 "The Johnson Plan for Vitalized Teaching" was incorporated with three forms of educational efforts.

1. Use of workbooks, classroom activities, and laboratory exercises.
2. Observation of good teaching and closely supervised teaching apprenticeship.
3. Careful guidance of a student's whole daily life and environment.



Hill House

Under the guidance of Dayton B. Smalley, a Johnson resident, the 1941 legislature appropriated \$100,000 for construction of a new administration building with library and classrooms. The building was erected on land given to the state in 1913 by the town and became known as The McClelland building after Donald McClelland, President.

The state legislature voted in 1947 to convert Johnson Normal School to Johnson Teachers College, a four year college giving it the ability to grant a bachelor's degree.



McClelland Building



Alumni House

The first athletic field at Johnson Teachers College was developed between Hill House and Alumni House in 1948.

In 1957, the legislature appropriated \$31,000 to purchase 125 acres of land for an upper campus and in 1958 the Despault property, a large dairy farm on top of the hill, was purchased. Construction began for a new dormitory for women/dining hall. The building was given the name of Martinetti Hall for Odino Martinetti, President. Dedication of the building was in 1960.



Despault Farm on the hill



Martinetti Hall

The school became Johnson State College in 1962 broadening its focus to become a liberal arts college.

An athletic field was completed on the hill in the fall of 1962 in time for soccer season. Springtime baseball was also played there. This field was used until 1967 when construction was started for an upper field. Soccer was played on the upper field while baseball and field hockey were played on the lower one.

With an appropriation from the state in 1963 and some additional funding the college began an

expansion of its facilities to accommodate its basic needs. The John Dewey Academic Center was dedicated on October 2, 1965. Half of the building was used as a lecture hall, also a classroom and some faculty offices. In a few years, the entire building was taken over by the library. A men's dormitory, Chester A. Arthur Hall was dedicated on the same day as the Academic Center. Also construction started on a new gymnasium which was completed in 1966.

During the years of 1967-1969 three buildings were planned, an arts and science building, a new auditorium and a dining hall. When completed these buildings became known as Bentley Science Building, Dibden Auditorium and Stearns Dining Hall. Construction of the Willey Library was at a later date.



Dewey Building

In 1971, Senators and Governors Hall were completed making Stearns Dining Hall the focal point between the two new dorms.

Through the many years the college has contributed to the town of Johnson in numerous ways providing teachers for our schools and active citizens for the town.

Johnson State College merged with Lyndon State College in 2018 and is now Northern Vermont University Johnson.





Bell that used to be in the belfry at the Normal School



Our Mission

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.

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