

WATERBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



WINTER 2018

Volume 19, Number 1

Author Joseph Citro Tells Tales of Spooky, Strange Vermont at Fall Program

By Cheryl Casey

Speaking to a full room at St. Leo's Hall, Joseph Citro began by reading an excerpt from his latest book, *Cursed in New England: Stories of Damned Yankees* (Global Pequot Press, 2018), to ask, "What makes for a good ghost story?"

For Citro, something remarkable truly needs to happen to make for a good ghost story. In all the years he has been exploring Vermont and New England ghosts, he said, he has learned that most ghost stories are simply boring. It's the truly weird, extraordinary, and baffling that captures his attention.

One such story is the local legend of Nettie Spencer, the socialite who once lived at The Old Stagecoach Inn. Passing away at the age of 98, Nettie remains attached to her beloved home and has been seen checking in guests to the Inn. John Barwick Jr., current owner of the Inn, helped support the evening's talk by providing lodgings to Citro in Room #2, Nettie's old bedroom. So far, no strange happenings have been reported from his stay!

Another story that drew wonderment from the audience came from Citro's hometown of Windsor, Vermont, where, for about a month in the

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New Archivist Begins Work in WHS Collections

By Cheryl Casey

Tracy Haerther has joined the Waterbury Historical Society as the new part-time Archivist. Haerther holds a B.A. in History from UNC-Wilmington and a M.A. in Museum Studies from University of the Arts (Philadelphia, PA), bringing extensive expertise in museum studies, genealogy, and archiving to this position. Haerther's primary duty will be to manage the Historical Society's collection records and acquisitions.

A resident of Stowe, Haerther also works as the Museum Director for the Noyes House Museum and Morrisville Historical Society.



Folklorist and author Joseph Citro (far left) spoke to a full room at St. Leo's Hall for the WHS Fall Program on October 25, 2017.

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L: Volunteers, both two- and four-legged, work to clear a building pad at the CCC Camp site near the Waterbury Dam. R: One of the Camp's river stone chimneys in need of repair.

CCC Camp Charles M. Smith Trail and Chimneys

By Anne Imhoff

In the fall 10 years ago, I was checking on the progress being made to the repairs at the Waterbury dam for an article in Exit 10. From the overlook parking lot I noticed to the right of the road, tucked into the woods, a huge stone chimney. I walked over to it and saw another chimney further in the woods. Thus began a ten-year saga.

The chimneys on two plateaus are part of the mile long CCC Camp Charles M. Smith, that built the Waterbury dam between 1935 and 1938 in response to the 1927 flood. After gaining permission from Susan Bulmer, Northeast Regional Director of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and assistance from Brian Lindner and 30 plus volunteers, the old camp roads were slowly revealed over the course of seven years.

Every summer, 2009-2016, on alternate Saturdays, hardy volunteers spent about two hours shoveling inches of dirt from cement slabs, cutting down small trees, and clearing brush. Herschell Murray cut the grass on the old roads, as shown on the 1937 Army Corps of Engineers map of the camp supplied by Bob Finucane. Barb MacGregor, from Ms. Bulmer's office, and a crew from Charles Grenier Consulting Engineer surveyed the entire north plateau in May 2014.

Meanwhile, Ms Bulmer had been searching for funds to construct a universally accessible trail through the camp; she managed to secure funding last year for

the first one third of the trail. With all the roads and many of the old building locations identified on the north plateau, Ms. Bulmer's office drew up the final plans for the trail. A new, larger, parking lot at the head of the trail was constructed by the state in 2015.

In March 2017, the Vermont Backyard Collective, organized by Conservation Alliance members including Ibex, Outdoor Gear Exchange, and Darn Tough Socks, was looking for a place that could use 80 volunteers for a workday. On July 14th, the Backyard Collective arrived at Little River State Park and broke into work groups with the park crew. New fencing was placed around the dam overlook, drainage ditches were dug, and larger trees felled, all in one morning! The following week, Timber & Stone of Calais began construction of the first one-third of the universally accessible trail.

A week after it was completed. Ms. MacGregor put up informational signs along the trail. It is a delightful, easy half hour walk through the woods and history.

To complete the construction of the remainder of the trail will require the State to find additional funding. BUT, none of the funding can address the repair and stabilization of the three beautiful, 80-year-old river stone chimneys that first drew me to the site! And they are beginning to show their age. Stones are beginning to fall out, the mortar is eroding, and cracks are beginning to appear.

Searching for funding for the repairs has been frustrating. The chimneys are not buildings, they are not a recreational facility, and they are not statues. The chimneys are a part of the camp and Waterbury's history, and should be preserved before it is too late to save them.

Recollections of WWII Service in Asia

By Calvin Dow

Editor's Note: The author, a native and former resident of Waterbury Center, continues his reflections from previous issues on being stationed in Asia during WWII.

My orders from the Colonel: Proceed by rail from our Karachi Supply Base #1, to Calcutta Supply Base #2, then by plane to our Supply Base #3 in Kunming, China. Our first stop on the All India Railway showed how the English controlled India. It was a tea break. Some British officers came out of their first-class quarters and walked to the steam engine hot boiler. They drew off a supply of hot water and made some of their national beverage. They invited my small group of Americans to join them. A nearby cashew nut bush provided munchables.

The Indian passengers preferred their native betel nuts, which contained a small addictive compound. The nut was red. The natives relaxed in their traditional squat position, chewing and spitting and perfecting their accuracy by aiming at scorpions with a big splash of red saliva that looked like blood wherever it landed. This was 1942.

In 1947, the Indian Revolution convinced the British that the despicable age of colonialism was drawing to a close. They departed the famous subcontinent. Freedom finally came to India.

Our next stop was New Delhi, where I was to meet the most famous man in all of India. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India, led the fight for freedom and spent two years in British prisons where he attempted a fast unto death. The newspapers around the world carried the story, forcing the British to release him. He was a lawyer, a Hindu Holy Man who divested himself of all his worldly possessions, except an ancient spinning wheel, in his total pursuit of public service for the millions of poor Indians.

I talked with Gandhi outside the British Viceroy Palace in New Delhi. He seemed to radiate an aura of beatific holiness and dedication. Now, 75 years later, when I talk with Danbury (CT) Indian businessmen, they are totally ecstatic to hear from a centenarian who, back in 1942, met in person the Father of their country.

Our next delay en route was a British

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Top and middle: Missing and damaged stones on the chimneys at CCC Camp Smith. Bottom: The new entrance to the history trail at CCC Camp Smith.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The WHS is accepting donations specifically in support of the restoration of the three chimneys at CCC Camp Smith. All levels of contribution are deeply appreciated.

New Members

Monica Callan & Peter Holm
Waterbury Center, VT

Paul & Patty Haverstick
Waterbury Center, VT

Bob & Laura Parette
Waterbury Center, VT

Thomas & Barbara Tomasi
Colden, NY

Ann Turkle
Waterbury, VT

Lisa Wernhoff
Montpelier, VT

Donations

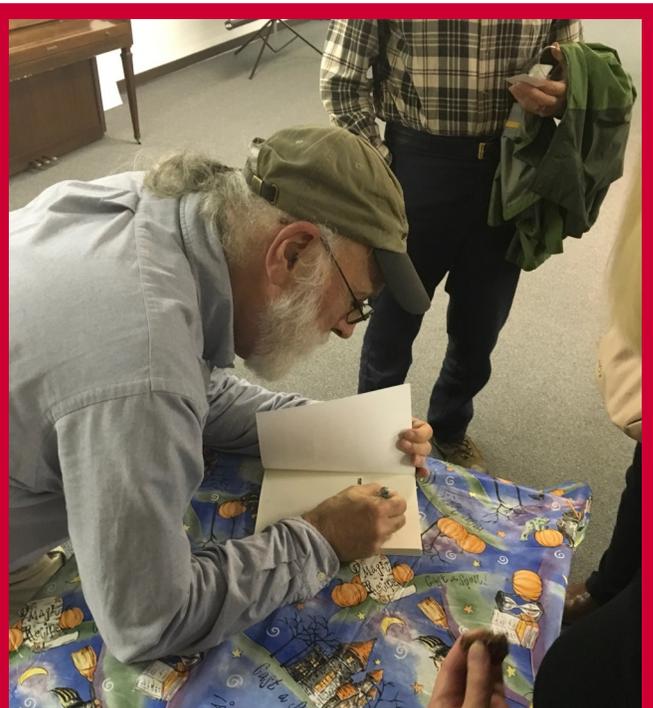
Blush Hill Country Club,
In Memory of Ed Steel—\$1000

Bill O'Brien—\$30

Emma Ottolenghi—
\$100

Meredith Rogers—\$25

Theresa & Gordon Wood—\$25



Joseph Citro took time to autograph books for attendees at the WHS Fall Program.

VT Folklorist Gives Halloween Handful

Continued from page 1

early autumn of 1955, one family's home was flooded by water mysteriously flowing from every crack, crevice, and crease. Experts were at a loss to find broken water lines or newly-formed springs that could explain the phenomenon, even as the contents of bureaus and closets were saturated. The cascades stopped just as suddenly as they began, and the water event slowly slipped from public memory. Citro's recent interviews with witnesses and surviving family members confirm but shed no further light on this extraordinary scenario.

Citro closed his talk with a reference to American writer Charles Fort, who said, "I cannot say that truth is stranger than fiction, because I have never had acquaintance with either." In fact, emphasized Citro, his role isn't to discern truth from fiction, but to document and preserve the stories that so capture people's imaginations.

And no, Citro hasn't yet seen a ghost firsthand, but he claims that if he did, he would certainly write about it differently!

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor,

April meeting at the Grange Hall Cultural Center—
Is this at the Waterbury Center Grange Hall? If in
Waterbury, at what location?

Excellent historical information about Pearl
Wasson and she was wearing her pearls. I always
liked that old time name and my grandfather's name
was Wasson Dow.

*Your Connecticut Member,
Calvin Rodney Dow*

Dear Mr. Dow,

Last April's meeting was held at the old Waterbury
Center Grange Hall. The building was sold to Monica
Callan and Peter Holm, of Waterbury Center, and they
both continue and extend the building's function as a
gathering place for community events, performances,
and exhibitions.

*Sincerely,
Cheryl Casey, Editor*

Meeting Minutes, October 25, 2017

St. Leo's Hall, 7pm—Respectfully Submitted
by Jack Carter, Secretary

Barbara Farr, presiding

New Business. Barb welcomed approximately 110 in attendance to the fall meeting. She spoke about the hiring of Tracy Haerther as our new archivist. She also talked about the grant that has been submitted to help finance recovering artifacts that might be found during Main Street reconstruction. Infrastructure along the route is over a hundred years old and no doubt historic treasures lay beneath.

Treasurer's Report. Paul Willard gave the financial report and it was approved.

Curator's Report. Jack Carter spoke about the first Saturday open house at the museum on November 4th. He encouraged people to come and see an exhibit that will highlight the 1927 flood. November 4th will be the 90th anniversary of the disaster.

Newsletter. Cheryl Casey, newsletter editor, gave an update of the next issue. Article deadline for the winter issue is November 15th. She encouraged members to subscribe to the electronic version. It saves cost of printing, environmentally friendly and it is in color.

Program Committee. Betty Jones spoke about the January meeting program which will be all about maple. Then Cheryl introduced Joe Citro, the evening's program presenter. She thanked the Old Stagecoach Inn for providing lodging for Mr. Citro and St. Andrew Church for use of St. Leo's Hall.

Horrific Halloween Handful. Joe Citro gave an entertaining evening featuring weird Vermont lore from the story of Nettie Spencer at Waterbury's Old Stagecoach Inn to the water sprites at the Waterman home in Windsor in 1955. Given the size of the attendance he is well liked and has a large following.

NEXT MEETING AND PROGRAM

January 24, 2018
Steele Community Room
Featuring Dr. Michael Lange
Speaking on
"The Meaning of Maple"



Dr. Lange is a professor of anthropology and folklore at Champlain College, specializing in cultural identity. His presentation draws on his most recent book, *Meanings of Maple* (University of Arkansas Press, 2017), and his many interviews with Vermont sugar makers.

This program is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. Copies of Dr. Lange's book will also be available for sale.



Dr. Michael Lange

SUBMIT CONTENT

Your stories, notes, and pictures are always welcome! To submit content for an upcoming issue, email the editor at dulcinea28@gmail.com or send by post to:

Dr. Cheryl Casey, 1389 Kneeland Flats Rd., Waterbury Center, VT 05677

Quarterly submission deadlines: February 15, May 15, August 15, and November 15

Recollections of WWII in Asia

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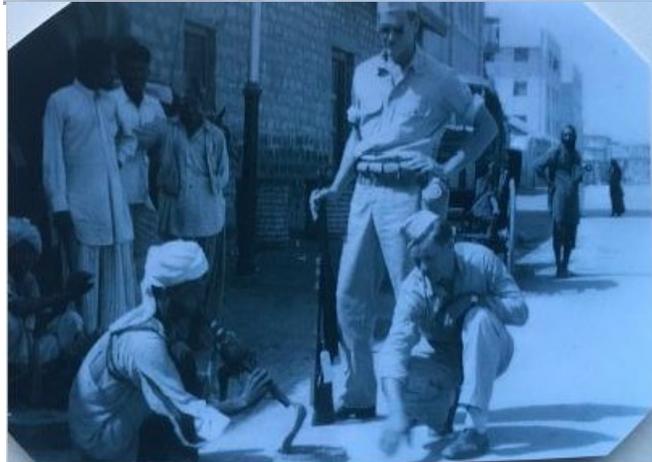
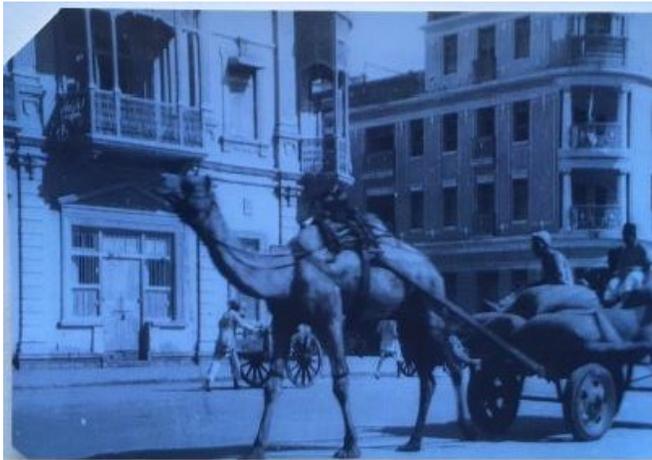
cantonment in Agra where we had time enough to visit one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Taj Mahal. Muslim architecture with marble arches is so beautiful. I was able to admire them in Egypt, Morocco, and the Alhambra in Spain.

At the Calcutta train station, we engaged a gharry, a particular kind of horse-drawn carriage, and proceeded through a city of two million people to our big Supply Base #2. Here I met Ryle, my cousin. We were two Waterbury Center Vermonters stationed in the CBI, the China-Burma-India Theater of WWII.

On Saturdays, he went to the Calcutta Race Track to gamble on the horses. At a British club, an English Captain and I played tennis doubles against two Indians - one of whom was Dilip Bose, who would represent India in the Davis Cup in 1947. Across the Bay of Bengal, the country of Burma was occupied by the Japanese Army. We were getting closer to the combat zone.

One week later, my orders dispatched me by train, north to Chabua, Assam in the foothills of the mighty Himalayan Mountains, the roof of the world at 32,000 feet.

I had now left the blistering, actinic rays of the tropical subcontinental Indian sun. Next up: a plane to China.



Scenes from 1942 India, clockwise from top left: A camel pulls a wagon down a street in Karachi (now Pakistan); the author, Sgt. Dow, carrying a bolt action rifle; and a cobra snake charmer entertaining US soldiers on the streets of Karachi.

Featured Figure: Isaac Elliot

The Renowned Furniture Maker of Waterbury

By W. Wendell Lowe

Editor's Note: This text has been lightly edited for readability from the author's handwritten speaking notes prepared for the 2017 Ghost Walk in Hope Cemetery.

Isaac H. Elliot was born in 1827, 100 years before I was, in the town of Groton, New Hampshire, near Newfound Lake. His father was Aaron Elliot, his grandparents, William and Sally Elliot.

He joined the 9th Regiment of the Vermont Volunteer Infantry in the summer of 1862. On July 9, they were mustered to New York City, where the company was given a warm welcome. Shortly after, the company was moved by ferry to New Jersey, and then to Virginia, near Alexandria. It was quite a march, and my great-grandfather, as company cook, had to manage poor food supplies.

Then the company marched to Harper's Ferry, where the entire company was surrendered to the Confederates. Isaac was taken captive and transported to the Confederate capital without injury.

He was held there for seventy days and given a pardon (printed on the back of a bill of lading from a railroad company), saying he would not fight against the Confederates anymore. On his way back to Union lines, a minie ball passed through his cape -- or his cap, depending on which version of the account you read; one says cap, the other, cape. After his discharge from a Union Hospital, he returned to Vermont.

During his military time, Isaac left a wife and a two-year-old daughter at home. His brother-in-law, Daniel Russ, had enlisted at the same time and went on to Gettysburg, one letter shows.

Harriet Russ, born November 25, 1825, married Isaac on July 24, 1854. She and Isaac had three children: Lois, Ada, and a stillborn son.

Isaac and Harriet lived out most of their married lives at 141 South Main Street, in Waterbury, in the home Isaac built there. Their last years were spent on the farm on Blush Hill (Roger Lowe and Jennifer live there now).

There are several examples in the family of Gramps' work skill. The bureau in the History Center was used by Jennie and I for most of our marriage. It was originally given to Roy Lowe. He had never married, so somehow we acquired it.

Isaac's hand tools were kept in a large wooden chest, about 2.5 feet wide by 2.5 feet high and 4 feet long. These tools were in the farmhouse when we moved in.

My father spoke of a foot-powered lathe that Isaac used. It was set up like a bench saw. He also had a foot-powered jigsaw-like tool that was part of his shop. The construction of a piece of furniture required expending a lot of energy.

Hand molding planes required one for each direction of wood grain and one pair for each type of molding. A finish or joining plane was about 30 inches long and 3 inches wide. It took great skill to make a nearly invisible joint between two boards.

Marking tools and chisels (which most modern carpenters use even today) made up most of the rest of his tools. Yes, he did have a lathe, which he used to turn out spindles, detailed pieces for his furniture.



**Above: Isaac Elliot
Below: The bureau
handcrafted by Elliot, in the
WHS History Center**





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