

# The Art of Giving

*The Belden Noble Memorial Library  
in Essex, New York*



*This is a love story,  
but it's not about romance,  
it's about the people of Essex  
who fell in love with the idea of giving  
Their passions were reading, learning,  
understanding, and sharing, and  
those passions became essence of the*

***Belden Noble Memorial Library.***



## **In the Beginning**

Our story begins in Essex, New York, which was first settled around 1765, and was originally part of nearby Willsborough. The two villages separated in April 1805, and by the late 1800s Essex had become a prosperous village on the Adirondack coast of Lake Champlain.

The building that is now home to the Belden Noble Memorial Library was erected around 1818 as the R. Noble & Sons General Store, owned by Essex businessman General Ransom Noble and his sons, Harmon and Belden. The Nobles owned several thriving businesses in Essex, including logging, shipbuilding, quarrying, and a leather tannery (circa 1804). The building still stands, about 50 feet behind this building. The tannery was built alongside a stream that provided water power to run its machinery. That stream, “Tannery Brook,” is now known as “Library Brook.”

## **The Noble Family of Essex**

According to the *History of Essex County* (1885), “The men of the Noble family . . . were men of more than ordinary strength of character, [they] acquired wealth, and were honored by their fellow-citizens with various offices and positions of trust.”

## **General Ransom Noble**

Ransom Noble left his family home in Connecticut on December 22, 1799. As he later recorded in the family bible, “I came to reside in the town of Essex [then part of Willsboro], county of Essex, State of New York, January 3d, 1800.” Later that year, on October 19, Ransom married Anna McNeil (July 25, 1780–March 29, 1831), daughter of the Hon. Charles McNeil and Thankful (Wooster) McNeil of Charlotte, Vermont. Her family’s residence was off Wings Point Road, at what was then known as McNeil’s Ferry, now the eastern landing of the Charlotte-Essex Ferry.

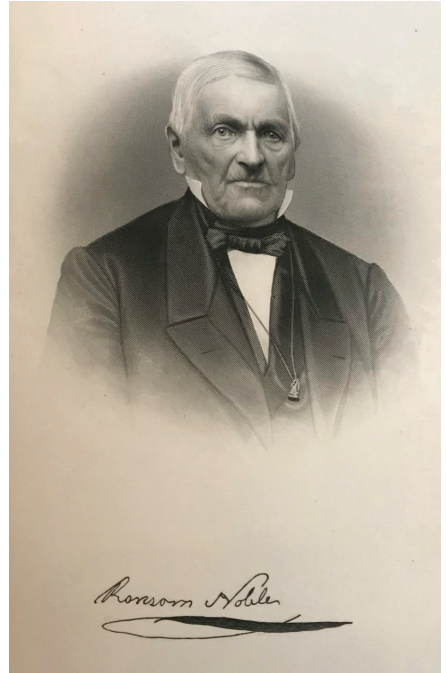
Ransom and Anna Noble had five sons: Charles (born 1801), Harmon (born 1803), Henry Ransom (born 1807), Belden (born 1810), and David (born 1813; died age 2 ½ months).

Ransom Noble served in the War of 1812 as 2nd Major of the 8th Regiment and commanded a battalion during the Battle of Plattsburgh—September 6–11, 1814, which ended the final invasion of the northern United States by British and Canadian forces. By the time he retired in 1821, he had been promoted to Brigadier-General of Militia.

After Anna’s death in 1831, Ransom married Eliza (Ross) Tobey, daughter of Hon. Daniel and Elizabeth (Gilliland) Ross, of Essex. They were married for eighteen years, but had no children. Tragically, Eliza perished in a fire on board the steamer “Empire” on the Hudson River on May 17, 1849.

Ransom had learned the shoemaking trade before coming to Essex, so he immediately set up his shoemaker’s bench and tools and arranged to start a tannery on Tannery Creek, in a building behind what is now Belden Noble Memorial Library. With \$150 in capital (about \$2,000 in today’s money), he opened a small store in his shoemaker’s shop and tannery, and went on to establish lumbering operations, an iron smelting factory, and a banking business (based mostly on barter.)

General Noble’s first home stood near the site of “Greystone,” the Greek Revival–style mansion later built by his son Belden. As Ransom’s business ventures increased, he purchased a large tract of valuable pine forest in what is now the town of Lewis. It was an investment that established the foundation of his fortune. As he began to harvest the pine, he established saw mills on streams throughout that part of Essex County, with eventually a dozen or more running at once.



**General Ransom Noble**

Born: New Milford, CT, August 16, 1778

Died: Essex, NY, June 5, 1863

Back in Essex, he also built a wharf and established vast lumber yards to hold shipments of both lumber and leather, and set up a charcoal iron factory at Willsboro Falls, where he operated a forge using ore brought in by boat from Moriah.

Ransom Noble served as Essex town supervisor in 1825–26, contributed funds to build the Presbyterian church in Essex (now Essex Community Church), and staunchly supported the Union cause during the American Civil War.

His sons Belden and Harmon were schooled in both general and business education at schools in Essex, the Lansingburgh (NY) Academy, and Plattsburgh. As General Noble grew older, he transferred his businesses to Belden, while Harmon directed the store and office. The brothers established a partnership as H. & B. Noble. By the time Ransom died in 1863, he was known as “the foremost businessman of Northern New York,” with a fortune valued at more than \$1 million.

## Major Harmon Noble



### Major Harmon Noble

Born: Essex, NY, November 1, 1803

Died: May 23, 1864

As the second son of Ransom Noble, Harmon Noble prepared for his career as a businessman by studying English and business at schools in Essex, Plattsburgh, and Lansingburgh Academy in Troy, New York.

On October 16, 1855, Harmon married Laura A. Welch (born August 31, 1823; died July 28, 1895; daughter of Peter and Martha Fraser Welch of Vergennes, VT). The couple had six children: Sara Elizabeth (1856–1888), Anna Laura (1858–1886), Jennie (1859–1922), Henry Harmon (1861–1934), and twins Martha Fraser and Mary McNeil (born May 5, 1863; died August, age 3 months).

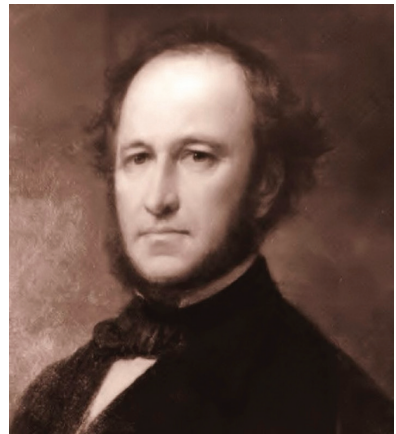
Harmon Noble served in the New York State Militia. Governor DeWitt Clinton granted him a commission as Major in March 1825, and he served as aide-de-camp on the staff of General H. H. Ross. As a young adult, Harmon assumed his father's business enterprises in Essex alongside his brother Belden. Harmon was first placed in charge of the R. Noble & Sons general store (now the library building). Under his guidance, the firm's prosperity grew even larger and more successful. He developed the lumber interests, the tannery and iron industries. Apparently, whatever he took on "was carried out with unflinching persistence, while all his dealings were conducted on principles of thorough honesty and justice." [*Genealogy of the Crane Family*]

Harmon died suddenly of a pulmonary abscess on May 23, 1864. He is buried in the Noble family plot in Essex Cemetery.

### **Colonel Belden Noble**

The third son of General Ransom Noble, Belden Noble was involved in his father's business interests from early adulthood alongside his brother Harmon. The two later established the firm of H. & B. Noble. Belden ran the "outside" operations of the Noble family business: lumbering, iron smelting, and the family farm (now Essex Farm). He was Town of Essex supervisor from 1843 to 1844 and from 1861 to 1862.

At age 46, Belden married Adeline Matilda Ferris, age 25, daughter of Charles and Mercy Macomber Ferris of Peru, NY. Their wedding was held on August 28, 1856, in the new Essex Presbyterian Church (now Essex Community Church), for which the Noble family had donated the largest amount. The newlyweds then



**Colonel Belden Noble**

Born: Essex, NY, June 11, 1810

Died: Alburg Springs, VT, July 15, 1887

moved into “Greystone,” a new Greek Revival–style mansion that Belden had built for them just north of the Nobles’ General Store.

Belden and Adeline had five children, though only two lived to adulthood. Ransom Ferris (born May 23, 1858–died Aug. 18, 1859); William Belden (born Essex, NY, Oct. 17, 1860–died Glenwood, CO, July 20, 1886). William was a noted alumnus of Harvard University (class of 1885) for whom a lecture series was later named; Clara Louise (born Feb. 23, 1863–died Sept. 6, 1863); Mary Maud (born June 1, 1866–died in Paris, France, Aug. 1, 1932); and Isabel Elizabeth, born July 10, 1868–died Nov. 14, 1868). Mary Maud married James S. Harlan, chair of the Interstate Commerce Commission (1914–19) and son of US Supreme Court Associate Justice John Marshall Harlan.

Like his brother Harmon and their father, Ransom Noble, Belden served in the New York State Militia as a commissioned officer, and was colonel of the 37th Regiment in 1840–41, the same regiment in which his father had served in during the War of 1812. Later, during the American Civil War (1860–65), he helped enlist volunteers, especially for the 188th New York.

Sadly, Belden Noble died on July 13, 1887, at age 77. He had been trolling in a boat in Missisquoi Bay, but drowned when he stood up and the boat capsized. He is buried in Essex Cemetery, Route 22 in Essex.

### **Adeline Noble, Founder of the Library in Essex, New York**

Adeline Matilda (Ferris) Noble came from a family that traces its ancestry to the English immigrants who came to the New World in the 1700s. Zachariah Ferris of New Milford, Connecticut, who arrived in 1708, was one of the town’s twelve original settlers. Adeline was the eldest daughter of Charles Ferris II of Peru, New York, and his wife, Mercy Macomber Ferris of Keeseville. Adeline was one of eleven children (four sons, seven daughters).

The Ferris children apparently inherited their creative talents from their great-grandmother, Clara Averill Ferris, who was a poet. Adeline also wrote poetry, and studied in Florence, Italy, with

the American sculptor Hiram Powers (1805–1873), whose life-size marble statue, *The Greek Slave* (circa 1844), earned him wide acclaim. Adeline was known as both a painter and a sculptor. The Ferris homestead in Peru, NY, is said to have been decorated with bas-relief portraits that she made. According to *Biographical Review* (1896), these were “excellent likenesses of her father and her mother. She is also a poet of high order.”



**Adeline Noble**

Born in Peru, NY, July 5, 1831

Died in Washington, DC, Nov. 4, 1910

## **The Birth of a Library**

Thanks to the vision of Adeline Noble, Essex, New York, has its own historic public library. According to the ALA website, the American Library Association was founded during a convention of librarians (90 men and 13 women) in Philadelphia at the time of the American Centennial Exposition in 1876.

A little poster in the library’s archives, dated June 29, 1875, proves that interest in establishing a library in Essex existed long before its official establishment in 1899. Adeline Noble had a prominent role in founding the “Essex Free Library Association,” whose early incorporators included her daughter Maud Noble Harlan, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Keyser, and Dr. and Mrs. D. Crawford Clark.

During the mid-1800s, one corner of the Noble General Store was set aside for a collection of books to be loaned to members of the public. It was likely the idea of Adeline Noble, wife

of Belden, for whom the library was later named. Early libraries often had humble beginnings. Just across the lake in Charlotte, Vermont, for example, books for the Horsford-Sherman Library were shelved in a large bookcase at the Old Baptist Church in East Charlotte in 1874.

That little library corner in Essex would soon grow into something much more ambitious: After the store closed, around 1867–70, the Noble family made the entire building available to the Essex Free Library Association.

The first known “Catalogue of Authors” for the library was recorded anonymously in a fine Spenserian hand, using black and red inks. The catalogue, which lists 1,054 volumes by 412 authors includes titles by William Shakespeare and George A. Henty, writer of boys’ popular adventure novels. Heavily represented are Charles Dickens, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Alexander Dumas, Robert Louis Stevenson,

*Programme of Dramatic Exercises*, flyer promoting a benefit event for the new library to be founded in Essex, New York. From the Belden Noble Memorial Library Archives

**PROGRAMME**  
—OF—  
**Dramatic Exercises**  
AT THE  
**SOCIABLE!**  
AT  
UNION HALL, ESSEX,  
Tuesday Even'g, June 29, 1875.

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**THE TEMPTER,**  
**OR, THE SAILOR'S RETURN.**

Robert Morton, a Lawyer ..... Mr. C. H. Stafford  
 Harry Drayton ..... Mr. E. R. Eaton  
 Oliver (Morton's office boy) ..... Mr. C. E. Bacon  
 Mary Drayton ..... Miss Nettie Eaton

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**YANKEE COURTSHIP.**

Prologue ..... Mr. S. E. May  
 Jonathan ..... Mr. Henry Plack  
 Hulda ..... Miss Emma Bacon  
 "Ye Ancient" ..... Miss Jennie Hall

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**FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

Harry Higgins, Editor of "The Bird of Freedom," ..... Mr. G. D. Anson  
 Increase Doolittle, a would-be editor ..... Mr. C. H. Stafford  
 Highfliter Nightshade, a sensational author, ..... Mr. W. D. Palmer  
 Milkenwater, a poet, ..... Mr. I. C. Stafford  
 Hon. Frothy Buncombe, member from Charcoal Hollow, ..... Mr. Geo. Cowan  
 Teddy O'Brien, Irish, of course, ..... Mr. Henry Plack  
 Sporter, one of the Shakers, ..... Mr. E. R. Eaton  
 Sorts, Printer's Delight, ..... Mr. S. E. May

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Doors open at 7 o'clock. Exercises commence at 7.45  
 Admission 20 cents, or 6 tickets for one dollar, if bought of Mr. I. C. Stafford before 7 P. M. of June 29th.

## II.

*Sodgs. Mary M.*

- ✓ Donald + Dorothy.
- ✓ Hans Brinker.
- ✓ The Land of Pluck.

*Doyle, A. Conan.*

- ✓ Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
- ✓ Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes
- ✓ Uncle Bernac.
- ✓ Rodney Stone.
- ✓ Exploits of Brigadier Gerard.
- ✓ Round the Red Lamp.
- ✓ A Study in Scarlet.
- ✓ A Case of Identity.
- ✓ Sign of Four.
- ✓ A Scandal in Bohemia.
- ✓ Green Flag.
- ✓ White Company

*Drummond, Henry.*

- ✓ Natural Law in the
- ✓ Spiritual World.

## II.

*Darling, Mary G.*

- ✓ The Four Girls.
- ✓ In the World.

*Dana, Mrs. M<sup>rs</sup> Starr.*

- ✓ How to Know the Wild Flowers

*De Foe, Daniel.*

- ✓ Robinson Crusoe.

*Dana, R. H. Jr.*

- ✓ Two Years Before the Mast.
- ✓ To Cuba + Back.

*Dana, Charles.*

- ✓ Naturalist's Voyage around  
the World.

*Du Maurier, George.*

- ✓ Trilby.
- ✓ Peter Rabbitson

*Du Chulli, Paul.*

- ✓ Stories of the Guerrilla Country
- ✓ The World of the Great Forest

*Catalogue of Authors*, dated August 6, 1901, pages 22 and 23. Hand-written in red and black inks. Collection of Belden Noble Memorial Library.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Rudyard Kipling, Washington Irving, and George Eliot. The most books under one name, Martha Henley, is a series of 31 titles that feature her young heroine, 8-year-Elsie Dinsmore.

## **The Essex Free Library Becomes Official**

The University of the State of New York granted Essex Free Library a provisional charter in 1899, and an absolute charter in 1906. At first, the trustees, known as “incorporators,” were appointed directly by Adeline Noble, but after her death in 1910, trustees were named by surviving family members until the early 1940s, when the Board of Trustees became self-perpetuating.

Before other area libraries were founded, patrons also came from the nearby towns of Willsboro, Reber, and Whallonsburg. During World Wars I and II, women would meet at Essex Free Library to prepare bandages for the Red Cross and other war efforts.

As part of the library’s ongoing efforts in educational and cultural enrichment, programs offered motion picture films of interest to persons of all ages. Some were presented in cooperation with such organizations as the Masons, Kiwanis, the Essex County Extension Service, and volunteer fire companies. At one time the Library even offered to lend copies of fine paintings to patrons, to study and admire at home.

The library’s trustees have long been active in encouraging the preservation of the historic aspects of the Essex hamlet and surrounding areas. In 1969, members of the Board of Trustees compiled and published “Essex: Lake Champlain’s Historic Harbor.”

Patrick Boyle served as the first president and secretary-treasurer of the library association’s Board of Trustees. Other members included Alpheus Morse, John B. Burnham, James S. Harlan, and Edward W. Haskins.

## **From Greystone Cottage to Belden Noble Memorial Library**

The vision that began with a group of citizens in Essex now shines more brightly than ever. Following Adeline Noble’s death in 1910 and her daughter Maud’s death in 1932, the Greystone estate passed to Maud’s cousin, Cornelia Hand Baird (Mrs. Henry H. Baird). Cornelia’s will (1954) provided for the maintenance of Greystone Cottage and its continued use as a library, with the

The University of the State of New York  
Education  Department

Amendment to Charter

ESSEX FREE LIBRARY

THIS INSTRUMENT WITNESSETH That the Regents of The University of the State of New York have amended the charter of Essex Free Library, located in the town of Essex, county of Essex, State of New York, which was incorporated by the Board of Regents under a provisional charter granted December 21, 1899 under the name of Essex Free Library, such provisional charter having been made absolute by the Regents on April 26, 1906 and amended on October 25, 1906, by changing the corporate name from Essex Free Library to

BELDEN NOBLE MEMORIAL LIBRARY OF ESSEX.

Granted May 22, 1981 by the Board of Regents for and on behalf of the State Education Department, executed under the seal of said Department and recorded therein.

Number 18,134



*William A. Hennick*  
Chancellor

*John M. Bell*  
President of The University  
and Commissioner of Education

Amendment to the Essex Free Library charter, officially recognizing its new name.

exception that if the family home and its related properties were ever sold, the trust would be dissolved.

Mrs. Baird's heirs offered the building to the library association in 1955. The trustees, however, felt that "due to finances" they could not accept that offer under the terms given. In 1974 Cornelia's daughter, Fermine Baird Williams Baker, deeded the library building and the parcel of land on which it stands to the Town of Essex in consideration of one dollar, with the stipulation that the structure "shall forever be used as a library." [The Library's collections remain separately owned by the Library Board.] The deed further stipulated that in the event the building should cease to be used for that purpose it would revert to "Fermine Baird Baker or to her heirs or assigns."

According an amendment to the library's charter, confirmed by a certificate dated May 22, 1981, issued by the Education Department of the State University of New York, the name Essex Free Library was changed to Belden Noble Memorial Library. Though it is unclear who initiated this change, it publicly commemorated the man whose success and vision were a positive force in historic Essex.



**Interior of Essex Free Library, circa 1905.** The area of the library in the far background, beyond the arches, is now known as the Dorothy B. Voorhis Reading Room. Archival photograph, Belden Noble Memorial Library.

## The Library as a Resource for Children

From the beginning, efforts were made to attract young readers. As early as 1908, children's borrowings amounted to about half those of adults. By 1947, the ratio had increased significantly – children were borrowing almost as many books as the grownups. This may be due, at least in part, to a program initiated at the Essex School by English teacher Amy Mason. Librarian Tracy Scudder said in her 1947 annual report that Mrs. Mason “advised which nonfiction books would be acceptable as outside reading for her classes. She displayed them on a table and found them well used by the juvenile group.”

In 1948, Librarian Scudder reported that the library had become a popular meeting place for both adolescents and older groups. “We also have tried buying picture books for the 4–6-year-olds,” she added, “so that their literary habits will be formed early.” By 1950 the importance attached to children reached the point where a rear section of the library was closed off with a glass partition and French doors to provide a separate room for them.



**Children's Room,**  
Belden Noble Memorial Library

## Generous Gifts from Passionate People

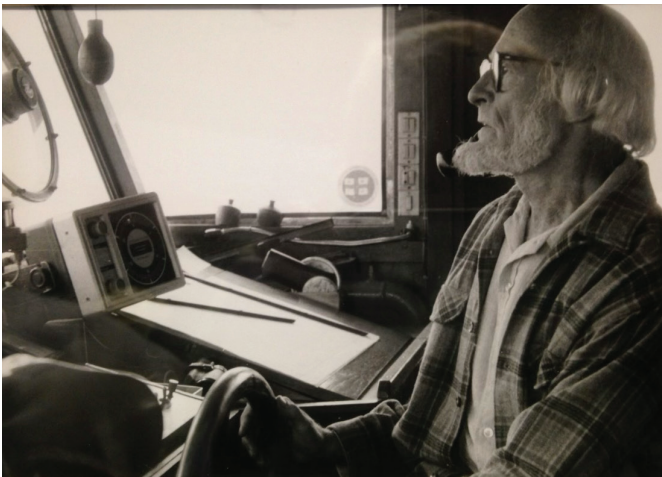
This library continues to grow and prosper thanks to the generosity of countless donors throughout its history. Several notable donors stand out for their memorable gifts and bequests, including Donald Beggs, Sally Johnson, and Dorothy Voorhis.

### Donald Beggs

Beggs Point, which reaches out into Lake Champlain close to the Charlotte-Essex Ferry, has an interesting history besides the fact that it bears the name of Donald Beggs, a seasonal resident of Essex from the 1970s to 1990s.

According to a 1930 Philadelphia census, Donald H. Beggs was born New York City in 1917, to Francis W. and Betty H. Beggs. He had one younger brother, Frank W. Beggs. Donald had earned a high school diploma, but beyond that was mostly self-educated. As a young man he was Music Program Director for WFLN / Classical Radio Philadelphia. Later, in New York, he worked as an annotator for WQXR / New York's Classical Music Radio Station, preparing lists of music for broadcasters to play on their radio programs.

Donald met his wife, Maron C. Fraser Beggs, at a fundraiser for WQXR sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Maron, born in New York City in 1919, was beautiful, shy, highly educated, and a talented pianist and violinist.



**Donald Beggs** at the wheel of his custom yacht, Omega, by which he traveled around the Mediterranean from his home in Dordrecht, Netherlands.

It helped that both could trace their ancestry to Scotland. They soon fell in love and were married.

In 1963, Donald built a small cottage for himself and Maron on Begg's Point, the same piece of land where the Hoskins, Ross and Company shipyard had once stood (the schooner "Wanderer" was launched there in 1853), the Lyon and Palmer blind and sash factory thrived until 1879, and the Essex Horse Nail Company flourished from 1880 until it burned in 1918.<sup>1</sup>



**Ruins of the Essex Horse Nail Factory at Begg's Point**, circa 1920, with the steamboat ferry Vermont (the largest boat ever launched from Shelburne Shipyard, 1903) in the background. Photo courtesy of Essex historian Shirley LaForest.

Sadly, the ruins of the old Nail Factory remained a pile of rubble until 1929. According to an article published on March 22, 1929, in the *Essex County Republican* [Keeseville], "Ancient Landmark at Essex is No More," "The property, which is situated on a point of land and commands a fine view both north and south on Lake Champlain, has been sold to one of the firm of Begg and Begg of New York City." By November that year, a brief note in the *Plattsburgh Daily Republican* thanked "Mr. Roderick Begg of Begg's Point for the cleaning up of the terrible old pile of bricks that had been there since the [old nail factory] burned down. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> David C. Hislop, Jr., *Essex on Lake Champlain* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), page 55.



**View of Donald Beggs's cabin "The Wart,"** at Beggs Point with their dog, Fiona, summer 1967. Photo courtesy of Greg Bryant.

Several people remember that Donald referred to his cottage as "The Wart," perhaps because it looked like a small growth on the "hand" of the point. Former Essex resident Greg Bryant, a close friend of Donald Beggs, says Beggs built the cottage of reclaimed barn wood, inside and out. Dates on the margins of old photos indicate that it was built in 1963.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Incurable Collector**

Beggs's friend from Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Cor Krooswijk recalls that Donald Beggs was an incurable collector of books and music albums. Donald simply could not pass by a music store, he says, without buying at least one album. But the same habit was also true of Donald Beggs in regard to people: According to Betsy Tisdale, a part-time resident of Essex whose family had a summer camp, Raspberry Knoll, at the Crater Club south of Essex, Donald "collected" people. He often invited friends to their "troll house" on the point, and together they spent many evenings in conversation about music, art, boats, books, and birds. At their home in the Netherlands, the Beggses often welcomed friends to musical "salons," where Maron and other musicians would play for hours on end.

## A Giving Heart

Donald Beggs did much to enrich Essex life during the short time he actually lived there. According to Morris Glenn, Beggs and the Scheinins “were at the ‘vortex’ that hit Essex in the early 1970s and transformed a [long-forgotten], quiet village into a place of some national significance in the field of historic preservation.”<sup>2</sup> Glenn recalls that Margaret Scheinin, a founding member of Essex Community Heritage Organization (ECHO) helped get the Essex Village Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.<sup>3</sup>

He also loved church organ music, and donated significant gifts to several churches in Essex. Beggs’s earliest documented gift to a church in Essex was in 1975, when he gave \$5,000 to restore the stained-glass windows in the historic Boquet Chapel of the Church of the Nazarene (now known as Foothills Baptist Church). Originally built in 1855, in a style called “Carpenter Gothic,” the design of the church was based on a plan by the noted American architect Richard Upjohn. Its historical significance became official with its listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.<sup>3</sup>

Beggs’s giving spirit also lives in a grand tracker-action pipe organ at the Essex Community Church. He ordered a custom-built tracker organ (not a modern electronic model) from Dutch organ-builders Jaap and Gijsje van der Veer and their sons Jan and Jaap Jr. Once completed, the disassembled organ was flown from the Netherlands to Essex Community Church, where Jaap and his son reassembled it on site.<sup>4</sup> Their work was finished in August 1990, and the first organ concert was held at the church on July 10, 1991.

As noted in an unsigned *Press-Republican* article of October 19, 1991, it was Donald Beggs who—before his death in March of that same year—had “donated a large sum toward the roof,” leaving \$7,000 to be raised by the congregation. Ultimately, the project was carried out, thanks again to this generous benefactor.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Morris Glenn, by e-mail to the author, February 4, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Listing #73001189, on National Register website, <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/ny/Essex/state.html>

<sup>4</sup>Lorraine Littlefield, “A Joyful Noise Unto the Lord,” [*Plattsburgh*] *Press-Republican*, August 19, 1990. See also: <http://Essexcommunityconcerts.org/organ.htm>

<sup>5</sup> “Old-style New Roof Slated for Essex Community Church,” [*Plattsburgh*] *Press-Republican*, October 19, 1991, page 9.

Finally, Donald Beggs bequeathed his vast collection of books, music, postcards and other items to Belden Noble Memorial Library, along with \$15,000 to prepare the upper room to house his gift and for much-needed repairs to the library. The library's second-floor reading room was named the Donald Beggs Reading Room, in honor of his generosity.



### **Doffy Voorhis**

The middle daughter of Robert and Dorothy Cross Burgess, Dorothy “Doffy” Voorhis was born in Manhattan, but spent most of her life in the suburb of Pelham. After graduating from Wellesley College with a degree in economics, she worked for Proctor & Gamble for seventeen years. Alongside her late husband, H M Baird Voorhis, Doffy was a very active volunteer in her community and church. In

Pelham these included the United Way, the Girl Scouts, the Pelham Arts Center, and Huguenot Memorial Church. For a number of years Baird and Doffy spent winter months volunteering for Habitat for Humanity in Americus, Georgia.

She first came to Essex in 1956, spending summers at the family home known as Dower Place (built in 1783), the oldest existing residence in the hamlet of Essex. In Essex, she was active with the Adirondack Art Museum, the Belden Noble Memorial Library, and the Essex Community Church.

Upon her death in 2021, the Voorhis family donated a significant sum to the Library Board to renovate the first-floor reading room, which has been renamed in her honor.

## Sally Patrick Johnson

Another generous donor to the Belden Noble Memorial Library was the Essex preservationist and benefactor Sally Johnson. According to her obituary, published in *VTDigger* and *Seven Days*: Sally was born in Burlington, Vermont on April 6, 1929, the daughter of Jane Howe and Robert Fleming Patrick. She attended Burlington Junior High and then the Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts, graduating in 1947. After graduating from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, with a degree in Sociology in 1951, she moved to Seattle, Washington, and married fellow Northwestern student James H. Johnson of Oklahoma City. They restored two houseboats in Seattle, and their son Stephen Patrick Johnson was born there in 1952.

Sally later moved to New York City, where she worked with publishers Prentice Hall and MacMillan, and helped to publish three anthologies with Harper & Row. She was married to literary agent Max Gartenberg, before moving to the town she loved for a lifetime, Essex, New York.

In Essex Sally Johnson paid contractors to restore 11 old houses. In 2009 she was recognized for this work by the Essex Community Heritage Organization (ECHO) and the Essex County Adirondack Garden Club. She was a member of the Town of Essex Planning Board for seventeen years, a member of the Essex County Planning Board, the Essex County Soil and Water District Board, and the boards of ECHO and the Adirondack Land Trust. In 1988 she founded the Kelsey Trust, which continues to support the environment, education, health, and children-and-families-at-risk in the Champlain Valley.

Her devotion to books, literacy, and the Belden Noble Memorial Library was expressed in her annual donations, which made it possible to purchase much-needed equipment and furnishings for visitors.



**Sally Johnson**

Born: Burlington, VT, 1929

Died: 2023

## **Volunteering: The Gift of Service**

Belden Noble Memorial Library has benefited from the generous gift of time and service from hundreds of volunteers. Among them are Katherine Cross, who was Library Board President for many years; Leila Wells, who tirelessly volunteered at the Library and whose portrait hangs in the Beggs Reading Room upstairs; and Dorothy Burgess Voorhis (1930-2021), whose dedication to the Library was commemorated by a generous financial donation from her family and was used to renovate a space at the back of the library, now known as the Dorothy Voorhis Reading Room.

## **Library Volunteers Across the Years**

So many others have given their time and skills to the library over the years, including:

Lee Ackley	Norma Goff	Janice Moran
Dorothy Bliss	Erin Hall	Etta Moredock
Bruce Boisen	Meredith Hanna	Kathy Nadire
Laura Bridge	Nancy Harper	Judith Noyes
Martha Clark	Peggy Harris	Monica Rumsey
Sid Couchey	Amy Heffner	Nicholas Rumsey
Kevin DeLaughter	Barbara Hoffman	Val Sayward
Maureen DeLaughter	Donald Hollingsworth	Patty Schultz
Lexi Noble DePinto	Veronica Hollingsworth	Charlotte Sherman
Chris DePinto	Patricia Ingelstrom	Donna Sonnett
Bernie Douglass	Eileen Kelly	Jani Spurgeon
Frank East	Ann Klink	Joyce Sukel
Karen East	Jim LaForest	Sheila Sullivan
Maureen Ecclesine	Dianne Lansing	Betsy Tisdale
Rose Fine	Claire LaPine	Jim Van Hoven
Anna Foster	Arleen Leaning	Colleen Van Hoven
Rinda Foster	Joe Lowe	Sandy Vance
Pat Gardner	Joan MacDougal	Leila Wells
Helen Goff	Marian Mason	Mary Ann Walls

## **The Library Today**

Today the Belden Noble Memorial Library stands at the heart of Essex. Beyond borrowing books, visitors here can also access free wi-fi, use its public computers and printers, and hold meetings in the Reading Room. The library hosts a lively lecture series, including “Getting to Know Your Neighbors,” established by dedicated library volunteers Jim and Colleen Van Hoven.

In 2016, the Library underwent major renovations, thanks to a grant of \$60,179 from the New York State Aid for Library Construction Program. Board President Colleen VanHoven and Library Director Tom Mangano raised additional matching funds from library patrons, the people of Essex, and others, who together contributed \$21,000. The Town of Essex, led by supervisor Ed Gardner, gave its full support to the library’s renovations. Board Vice-president Maureen DeLaughter wrote the grant application and supervised the project, which included upgrades to the library’s electrical and lighting systems, repairs to the slate roof, and new insulation, storm doors, and storm windows.

During the renovations, the unused second floor rooms were repurposed to create a new Children’s Room stocked with books, toys, games, and a puppet theatre; the Donald Beggs Memorial Reading Room now has a suite of comfy furniture, to serve as a quiet, comfortable place to sit and read.

## **Looking to the Future**

In the years since its official founding in 1899, the Belden Noble Memorial Library has witnessed many changes. Thankfully, the people of Essex have always shown strong support for their beautiful old library, yet financing continues to be a major concern. Fundraising activities have included silent auctions, bake sales, and used book sales, all of which supplement annual funding support from the town government to help cover essential costs. Other valuable support comes in the form of donations from friends of the library and memorial gifts. Bequests, such as the one so generously left by Essex resident Donald Beggs, help ensure that this historic library will remain a vigorous educational and cultural asset in Essex for years to come.

## OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES

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Engraving of Major Harmon Noble by B. Little, published in *History of Essex County, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*, edited by H. P. Smith, 1885. Framed engraving donated to Belden Noble Memorial Library on April 10, 1976, by Anne Noble Proctor, great-granddaughter of Ransom Noble.

Image of Colonel Belden Noble from the *Press-Republican*, Plattsburgh, NY

Portrait by Adelaide Belden Noble François Flameng, 1903. Oil on canvas, 35 x 28 1/2 inches. Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Bequest of Mrs. James S. Harlan (Adeline M. Noble Collection) 1933.4.3. Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

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because the library continues to grow and change  
as it responds to the community it serves.  
Please join us in volunteering or by contributing a  
monetary gift, the gift of stock,  
or a long-lasting bequest*

***Thank You!***

**Belden Noble Memorial Library**

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