

## History of the Brandon Town Office Building -- by E. Blaine Cliver

On Friday, March 28th in 1828, the Conants of Brandon, John and sons Chauncey W. and John A., purchased a piece of land from William Knowlton of that same town for the sum of \$20.<sup>1</sup> William Knowlton signed the deed the following Tuesday before David Sanderson, Justice of the Peace. So began the start of one of the more important buildings in Brandon's downtown.

The deed signed by Knowlton on April 1, 1828 described the land purchased as "...beginning at the post in the S.E. corner of Isaac Merriam's front yard. thence E. 34 S. 4 Rods and 22 links (about 80.75 feet) in a line with an Elm tree, which brings it about even [with] the range of the west end of N. Parmenter's Shop on the opposite side of the pond (Neshobe River). Thence to the pond it being 8 links distance (about 5.3 feet), then down the river to the highway thence to the bounds began at. Said premises to be in common for the mutual benefit of all the parties named in this deed, for the purpose of crossing & recrossing (sic), to their several lands & buildings, except such path as the said John, Chauncey W. & John A. shall require for locating a building a building they are about to erect across the pond 55 feet by 36, the south end to range with the south side of the said Conant Brick Store, and situate[d] west of said Parmenter Shop, not infringing on the rights guaranteed or expressed with Dr. Isaac F. Merriam."<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in this deed, the Conants were only purchasing land on the north side of the river.

(See Fig. 1)

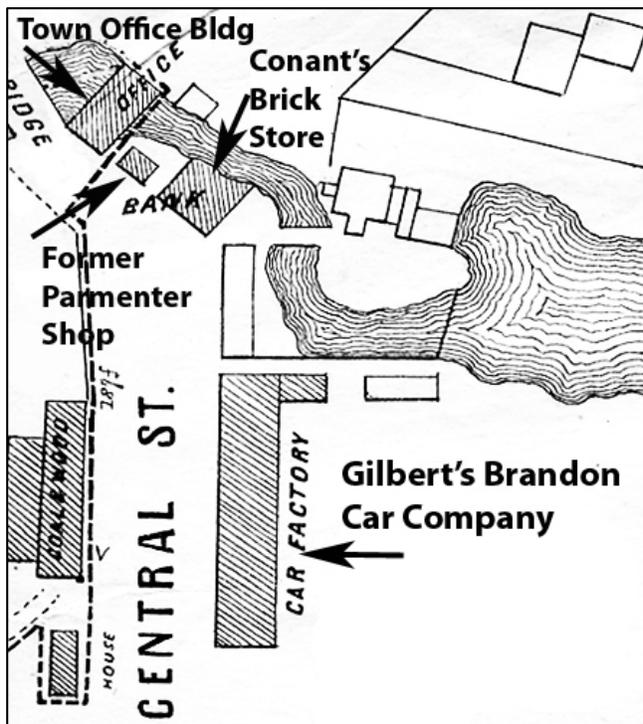


Figure 1, Section from an 1854 map of B.I. & C.W. Co. property.

Years before the Conants contemplated their building, Silas Deming of Brandon was granted a 999-year lease by the town selectmen, in 1806, giving Silas the "...privilege of Erecting a store house which is to stand nearly joining the Southwesterly end of Stephen Bailey's Shop [Parmenter Shop] Runing (sic) Over the Water..."<sup>3</sup> Clearly Deming was granted the right to build a building out into, or over, the river. This is confirmed by a deed to Samuel Mott from Deming in which the lease is mentioned stating that the building was "...to run over the Water almost across the Mill pond."<sup>4</sup> The structure that was built became known as the 'Deming' store or shop. After a series of ownerships, the land and "...a certain store standing and being in the vilage (sic) of Brandon commonly known & called by the name of the Deming store..."<sup>5</sup> were purchased

by John Conant in 1816. By 1823 it appears that Deming's store was no more for in a deed sharing ownership with two of his sons, no mention is made of Deming's store.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in 1828, the

Conants bought the land on the north side of the river and built their new building across the 'pond.' What happened to Deming's building is uncertain, but it appears not to have been built completely across the river and, therefore, would have been less stable in flood conditions than a building built entirely across the water.

By the close of 1828, a 55' by 36' brick store had been constructed across the river and the date '1828' can be seen in the fanlight over the north exterior door from the second-floor. No permission from the town selectmen was sought since, with his 1816 purchase of the land on the south bank, John Conant received with it the 999-year lease for building over the river. The building, now used as the town office building, became the office for the Conant's enterprises, which included a grist mill, spring shop and the ironworks across the road. Not only did it serve that purpose for the Conants but the first floor was divided longitudinally, from front to back, so that half of the building could be rented to generate income.<sup>7</sup> The second floor also seems to have been leased as tenements.

In 1852, as part of the purchase of the Conant Iron Works by the Brandon Iron and Car Wheel Company, of which John Howe, Jr. was the agent and an owner,<sup>8</sup> the building that had been built across the river

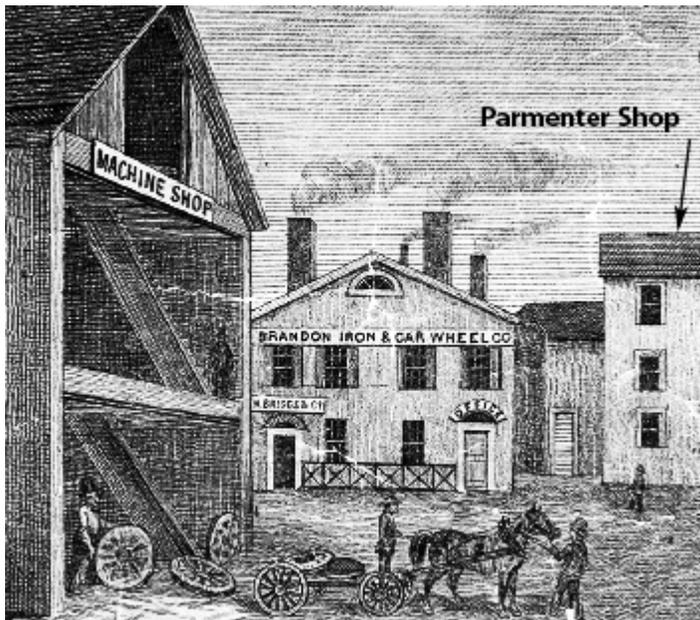


Figure 2, 1854 drawing of the town office building. Parmenter's shop can be seen on the right. In an 1835 deed it is described as "...the new three story brick shop." BLR 15-206

became the office of the new enterprise. In the deed the office structure is described as the "...Brick Store Standing over the Water & near the Bridge & opposite the furnace ground, being about 55 feet long by 36 feet wide bounded South, West & North by the highway or common and East by the wall of s'd [said] building with right of way for an outside stairway on the East side tenement."<sup>9</sup> Owing to the 1855 bankruptcy of Myron Gilbert's Brandon Car Co., Howe lost his largest customer for railroad-car wheels and, although he continued to manufacture car wheels, he began looking for other products that could be manufactured in his foundry. With the purchase of a scale patent in 1857<sup>10</sup>, he began the Howe Scale Company, which in

the latter part of the nineteenth century was to become one of two major producers of scales in Vermont, earning many awards at fairs and exhibitions in the United States, as well as the gold, silver, and bronze medals at the 1878 Paris Exhibition in competition with manufacturers from all over the world."<sup>11</sup> Officially, the B. I. & C. W. Co. remained the parent company of Howe Scale and, prior to its move to Rutland in 1877, the town office building was the company's headquarters. The Brandon Manufacturing Co., successor of B. I. & C. W. Co., also had offices on the east side of the building until the late 1870s.<sup>12</sup> Of note is the mention of the Brandon Iron & Car Wheel Co. in Bishop's, A History of American Manufactures from 1608 to 1860, revised and published in 1868, as only one of two companies in the state worthy of inclusion in the volume, the other being Fairbanks Scale Co.<sup>13</sup>

During the period between 1854, when the map was made with the sketch of the building (See Fig. 2), and the earliest photograph we have showing the structure in 1868, some changes were made to the building and the area around it. (See Fig. 3) A new stone bridge had been begun in 1867 over the river, and a sidewalk from the bridge extended in front of the office building. Two new sets of steps went up to entrances on either side of the front facade, and a new porch extended across the front. A new wooden sidewalk connected the porch to the new addition on the 'Bank Block' (now Leary's building) to the east. (The Bank Block was named for the Brandon Bank, an early bank in Brandon, which was nationalized in 1864 and became the Brandon National Bank.<sup>14</sup>) In this 1868 photograph taken by James Cady, a photographer living in Brandon from 1864 to 1869,<sup>15</sup> a set of stairs can be seen on the east side leading down from the building's second floor, presumably for tenants living there. (See Fig. 3)

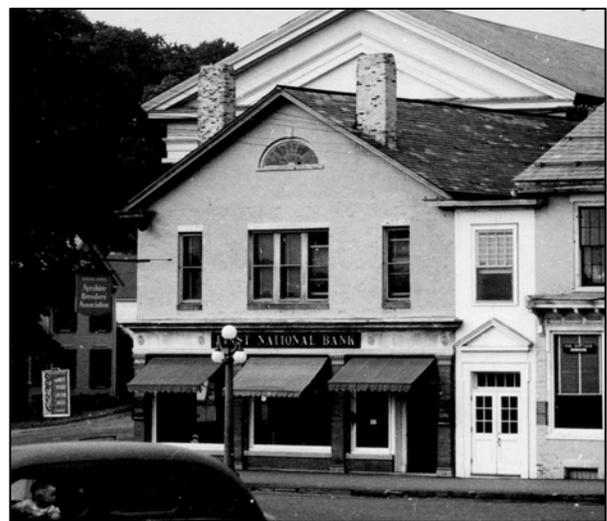


**Figure 3, ca. 1868 J Cady photograph of B.I. & C.W. Co. office with the Town Hall in the background.**

Briggs & Co. (See Fig. 2) because the B. I. & C. W. Co. continued to occupy the east side, presumably leasing the space from the bank.<sup>18</sup> In Figure 3, the words below the pediment of the office building are 'Brandon Iron & Car Wheel Co.'.

By 1921 the bank took over the whole of the building's first floor and removed the longitudinal bearing wall that separated the occupants on the first floor. Since removal of the bearing wall left the second floor unsupported, two trusses were installed in the attic from which the second floor framing was hung with five iron rods. Also installed at this time were new windows added to the first floor, replacing all of the existing windows, and new windows in the center of the south and west second-floor walls as well as at the north end of the east wall. All of the old six-

In 1864, the First National Bank purchased the building from the B.I. & C.W. Co. for \$2,300<sup>16</sup>, and an 1885 Sanborn map shows the bank as occupying the building's west side while a grocery store is on the east side. However, in 1864 the bank did not immediately move into the building. The 1868 Cady photograph, which was taken from the roof of the newly built Simonds Block (where the Smith Block now stands), shows the west side of the building closed up as if unoccupied. As shown on the 1869 Beers map of Brandon, the First National Bank, the first nationally chartered bank in Brandon in 1863<sup>17</sup>, had moved into the building in a space previously occupied by N.



**Figure 4, ca. 1947 view of town office building**



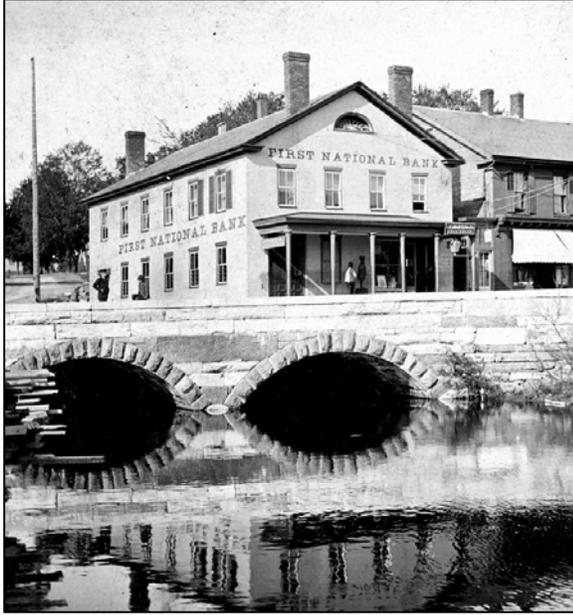


Figure 7, First National Bank ca. 1900 with " J.E. Gray & Sons Co., Groceries" on the east side.

history of Brandon. The Town Office Building also housed, for 88 years, the town's first nationally chartered bank, the First National Bank, as well as numerous local businesses including a grocer and an insurance office. The present structure is of value and importance to the town and deserves recognition for these merits as being an important part of the cultural heritage of downtown Brandon.

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## Endnotes

1. Brandon Land Records, Vol. 13, page 6.
2. *ibid.*
3. BLR, Vol. 6, page 500.
4. BLR, Vol. 6, page 510.
5. BLR, Vol. 9, page 123.
6. BLR, Vol. 11, pages 41 & 42.
7. All of the early Sanborn maps show the first floor divided longitudinally.
8. **Description of Property Belonging to the Brandon Iron & Car Wheel Co., in Rutland & Addison Counties, Vermont; with Agent's Report of 1852 & 1853**, Tuttle & Co's Steam Printing Establishment, Rutland, April 1854.
9. BLR, Vol. 22, pages 136, 137, 138.
10. **Brandon Vermont a History of the Town 1761 - 1961**, The Town of Brandon, page 51.
11. University of Vermont Libraries, Special Collections, Howe Scale Company Records, *The American Exporter*, New York, December 1879
12. See sketch of building on map of Brandon, published by James D. Scott, Philadelphia, 1854.
13. Reprints of Economic Classics, Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1966, p. 455-456.
14. **Brandon Vermont**, *op cit*, page 234.
15. *Vermont Record*, September 16, 1864, p. 71. Cady is not found in the 1870 Census for Brandon.
16. BLR, Vol. 27, pages 399,400.
17. **Brandon Vermont**, *op cit*, page 235.
18. *Outline of the Real Estate of the Brandon Manufacturing Co. (1869-1877)*--a survey of the company's property found in the BHS collection and shows the B M Co. occupying the east side of the building.
19. Brandon Union, March 11, 1921; June 10, 1921; October 7, 1921
20. **Brandon Vermont**, *op cit*, page 235, and BLR, Vol. 72, page 70.
21. BLR, Vol. 73, page 80.