

The Historic Burrows House

A Vernon Vermont landmark since 1849

By Ken Nokes



Built in 1849 as the Burrows House Hotel and Mansion

I

Introduction

The Historic Burrows House, at 1875 Fort Bridgman Rd in Vernon Vermont was originally built by Jarvis F Burrows in 1849. The 20 room mansion was constructed as a personal residence, and hotel. It was one of the first commercial businesses in Vernon.

In that year only 32 states had been admitted to the union. The Civil War was 12 years away and the railroads were just beginning to replace the stage coach.

The building has been in constant use for the last 170 years, has had five different owners, and many uses including;

Housing, as a hotel, personal residence, and apartment house

Restaurant

Entertainment, many dances have been held on the 1700 square foot "spring" dance floor.

Plays were performed in the dance hall from a stage at the end of the room.

Transportation, the hotel building was built by Jarvis F Burrows after the railroad agreed to accept land from Jarvis F Burrows to build a RR Depot across from the proposed hotel.

A livery stable was included with the hotel. The second owner T L Johnson had a daughter, who owned one of the first automobiles in Vernon.

In the late 1980's, when the whistle Stop store and deli was operating, it wasn't unusual to see an engineer stop a train get out of the cab and walk across to the store to get coffee, or a pilot land a helicopter across the street in a field and come into the deli for lunch. Business was good back then.

The National Rifle Club, from 1868-1896, the annual match was shot at the Burrows rifle range across from the Burrows House.

Agriculture, originally the Burrows House was located on a 320 acre farm that bordered the Connecticut River, The third owner A G Barnes ran a feed and grain business at the location.



Electricity, some of the Italian workman for the Vernon Dam lived here during its construction, also many nuclear personnel rented apartments when the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant was operating.

Telephones in 1891 and telegraph installation in Vernon

U S Post Office, from 1961-1997.

St Michael's Catholic Church held Sunday Mass there from May 1965 until 1970

The Whistle Stop General Store and Deli, was there from 1986-1997

Dance lessons, scouts, and other community programs were held, usually in the huge dance hall.



The Historic Burrows House, as it looks today

Vernon Grange 228 started on 22

March 1889, and moved to the Burrows House, now called The Vernon Hotel in 1914. They hosted many, plays, dances, suppers, and meetings.

It served as an emergency First aid station during WWII

Various public meetings were held here in years gone by

Wedding services were performed here, and many wedding receptions were held.

Chapter 1

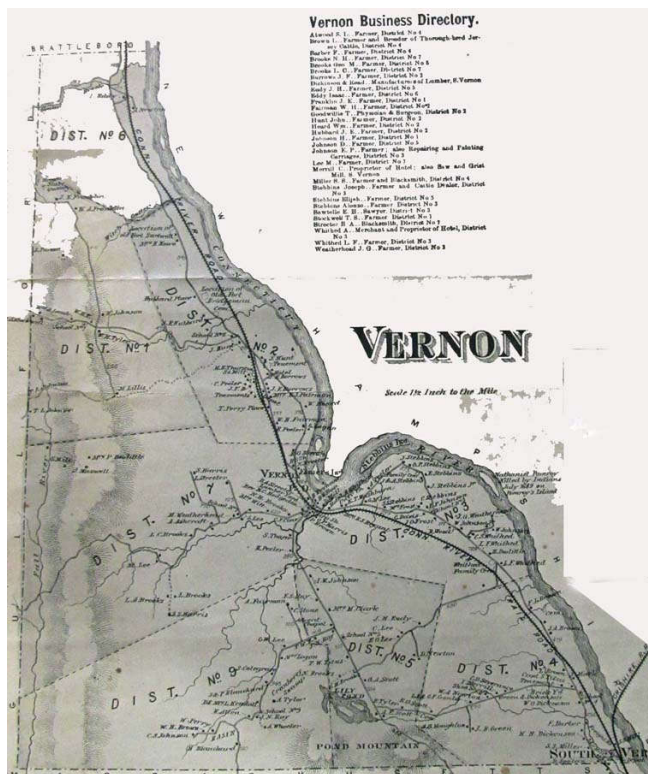
Jarvis F Burrows

Jarvis F Burrows purchased the property to build the Burrows House from Zadock Wright and his wife Mary Stebbins Wright, They were the parents of his wife Beulah.

Jarvis and Beulah were married March, 30, 1835, he was 23 and she 31 years old. They lived on the Wright Farm until they moved into the Burrows House in 1850.

The Wright farmhouse site is now the location of the town office building. The farmhouse burned on February 14, 1896. The owner, at the time, was Tyler L Johnson. One of his employees lived there, and it was insured.¹ Johnson rebuilt a very impressive home for his wife and daughter, soon to be known as the Johnson-Staten house. That burned down in the 1950,s or 60,s, and the town offices were built.

Zadock Wright died in 1839 and Mary died in 1840



The property description was vague, but started at the Connecticut River and went West of the railroad tracks (before there were railroad tracks) and from the North school number 2, at the fork of the present Ft Bridgman Road and Governor Hunt Rd, South to where (I do not know exactly), and contained about 300 acres.

The Wright land was part of a grant from the King of England to Gov. Benning

Wentworth of New Hampshire and then to John Hunt. The original amount of land was about 800 acres.

Town of Vernon was chartered as Squakheag, province of Massachusetts, and is the oldest charter in Vermont, August 13, 1672. It is also the smallest town in the state.²

Col Jarvis Fish Burrows was born January 16, 1812 in Leyden Mass, d. October 8, 1875. His wife Beulah Minerva Wright Burrows was born May 17, 1804, in Vernon VT. d. February 24, 1889.

They had 3 children two died in childhood, an infant son d. 1844, a two year girl, Beulah Minerva 1840-1842, and Hunt Wright Burrows 1836-1874.

Jarvis was very civic minded and served on the following duties and committees; Selectman, Town Representative to Montpelier, 1843-1844, 1852-1853, 1862-1863, Justice of the peace from 1842-1852, He served as road commissioner, deputy sheriff, and was an active member of the Union Church. He donated an expensive set of books to the Law Library, even though he was not a member of the bar. He was a trusted friend, who served on probate duties for acquaintance that had passed on.

His business interests included, the Burrows House, farming, a slate quarry, lumber, a sawmill, and in 1864 he sold 7 tons of tobacco for 30 cents a pound,³ so Tobacco was an important crop. He also was in an advertisement for a Brattleboro company, where he endorsed the benefits of trusses, which were used by men that had a hernia problem.⁴



Union Church b.1899 fr.V.Vaughn

The “Millerites” at the church

Around 1842, Jarvis’s duties as first Selectman caused him to be involved with the disagreement between the “Millerites”

religious movement and the Methodists or Unitarians the other group that shared the church in Vernon. The disagreement had reached a point where a leader of the “Millerites”; described as “a thickset, assertive man of a good deal of mental and physical power. Doubtless believing himself in the right, he declared that no human hand would prevent him from holding services in that building.

Jarvis was sitting on the steps of the church building with the two other selectman. Two large groups, one supporting each side, faced each other.

Tensions were high when the Millerite leader approached Jarvis on the church steps and said “Jarvis Burrows, I heard it said you had stated that if I went into this church today it would be over your dead body. Did you say it? I want to know for I am now going in.” The cool-eyed man in front of him did not rise from his place. Very deliberately he raised his hand to his neck and untied and removed, as though he had forgotten to do it before, his silk necktie. Then he spoke very quickly, “I say it now.”

The supporters of both sides stood a moment as the two strong men gazed at each other. Then Jarvis and the authorities won. Slowly the “Millerite” leader turned away. “Draw the wagons into a circle and we will have services in the open air,” he said. So the matter ended.⁵

The point of this story is to show that Jarvis was a strong leader.

Another business interest was The Vernon Cannon

He got involved with some other investors and the inventor of a 20 ton, twenty four cylinder revolver, called the Vernon Cannon, assembled in Vernon in 1859.⁶ It was a dud, but the interesting thing was the person who led the government committee that came to Vermont to investigate. It was none other than US Senator Jefferson Davis, who soon would have his own army and end up being the only rebel that wasn’t given a pardon for his treason.

It's too bad it didn't work out it would have made a big difference in the Civil War.

Jarvis is mentioned in many newspaper stories of the day, and he was mostly described as a successful well liked person in both his public service and his business.

Jarvis dies and his estate is insolvent

The Windham County/First National Bank Failure 1881

I have linked these two subjects because Jarvis was a director of this bank. He was never accused of any malfeasance, in fact he was defended in a newspaper account as being a solid upstanding citizen and could not have had anything to do with the scandal.

Jarvis died in 1875 after a short illness, and all his property was claimed by creditors. The Burrows family were unaware of money problems. Wife Beulah only ended up with the Frink house, two doors south of the hotel, valued in court papers at \$500. The matter of Jarvis's insolvency at the time of his death is curious. The Burrows family story from that time was that people came forward and made claims against the estate for debts Jarvis had already paid, but he neglected to get a receipt, or the paid up note.

According to the records I was able to get from the probate court archives, Jarvis had claims against his estate in the approximate amount of \$30,000, more than the estimated value of the estate. There were about 100 entries, but two claimants were interesting. (I didn't scrutinize any others)

Tyler Johnson's claims totaled about \$14,000.

One of Johnson's claims was for \$4923, which is almost exactly the amount showed on the failed Windham County Bank's past due notes, which was \$4932 attributed to Jarvis and listed in the bank receivers report in 1864 as a note being unknown as to payment or in dispute.

S.M.Waite's name is also tied to Jarvis on this list, on another matter. Waite was the treasurer and president of the Windham County Bank,⁷ which became the First National Bank when the

Federal Government put banks under the Federal system. It's

possible that Johnson bought

Jarvis's note in 1864 or sometime



after that date. But when he made the claim against the Burrows estate, why didn't he add any interest, and why was there no record in Jarvis's papers? It's possible Jarvis did pay Johnson, and Johnson kept the note and wrongfully claimed it against the estate.

Another curious thing is that, Johnson is also claiming \$2441, and S.M.Waite is claiming \$2416 against Jarvis's estate. There is probably a very good reason for this, but those amounts are just too close to be a coincidence. It was alleged that Waite had been doctoring the books of the

Windham County Bank and the bank was actually insolvent when its assets were used to open the First National Bank.⁸



Note the two bank documents

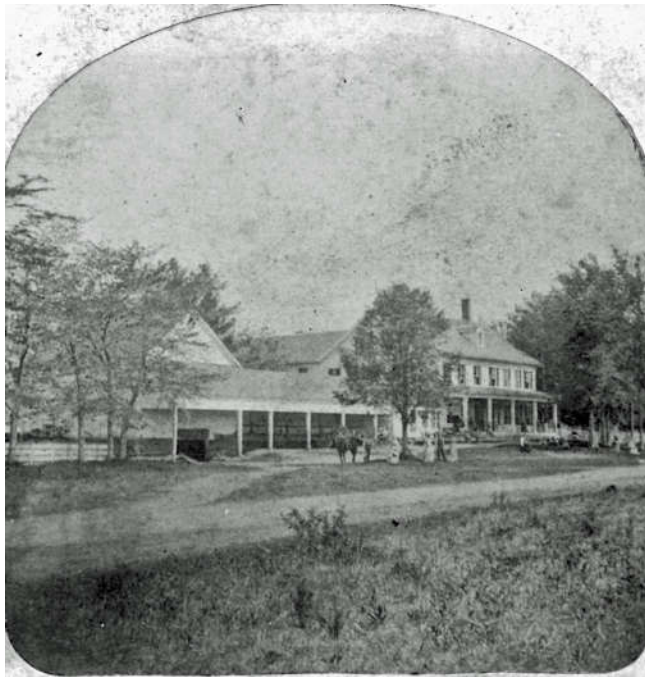
signed by S.M.Waite. The Windham County Bank is a dollar bill, and the First National Bank document is a check. State, or at least some state banks could issue money. Bank presidents had a lot of power and not a great deal of oversight.

Waite was arrested and tried in 1881 for apparent dishonesty that resulted in these bank failings.

Newspaper accounts of the time and records of Waite's own testimony were damning.

It could be that Waite was the culprit all along and Jarvis and Johnson were unknowingly involved by Waite.

There is enough evidence that Beulah may have been swindled. However, Beulah and her council fought these claims against the estate for about two years. The SOS achieves researcher



*Burrows House North side*¹⁰

that did the probate search for me said that it was an extremely large case with many motions/ documents etc. So, I guess at this point over 140 years later, one must accept the courts findings now, as Beulah did then. There was also the many other claims, if nothing it indicates a lack of attention to bookkeeping, but it also makes you wonder, if finances were so bad, why wasn't Jarvis forced into bankruptcy years before he died?⁹

Also, why weren't liens filed against the property in the Vernon Land Records, and why no newspaper stories of his bad debts?

Jarvis's obituary

"Vermont Record and Farmer October 8, 1875"

Too much is often said concerning the character, habits and life of those recently departed. We cannot always know through what hardships, what strifes, what opposition they

have passed—what were their motives—what the secret springs of action—we, therefore, cannot always judge correctly and are far more apt to judge harshly than otherwise. I cannot omit to pay a mere tribute of respect to the memory of the late

Jarvis F. Burrows

Mr. B was no ordinary man. By nature he was gifted with a keen perception, a great memory, and the power of attraction the equal of which but few men can boast. He was a strong man—a decided man—a whole-souled man contact with him always left a strong impression. Most were attracted— few repulsed—what seemed at first harsh, was almost invariably softened by longer acquaintance. No man of Mr. B's stamp could be without his enemies. We are apt to hate some persons because we do not know them and we will not know them because we hate them. Mr. B. was no half-way man; decided in everything. His generosity was rarely equaled. Nothing was too good for his friends. Men who knew him in prosperity, who were the recipients of his lavish purse in former years, who date their start in life—their position—to his advice, are not a few. His hospitality was unbounded; it was known far and near. His acquaintance was large, and he made himself known wherever he was. At home he was the generous host; abroad he was the congenial, polite, attractive man: in his family a provident husband, an indulgent father; as a neighbor, kind and obliging, always ready to help the worthy poor; as a citizen, faithful in every public office. His loss will be greatly felt—none more so in the town. His funeral was largely attended. Peace to his memory.¹¹

Chapter 2

The Burrows House, Jarvis Burrows Proprietor



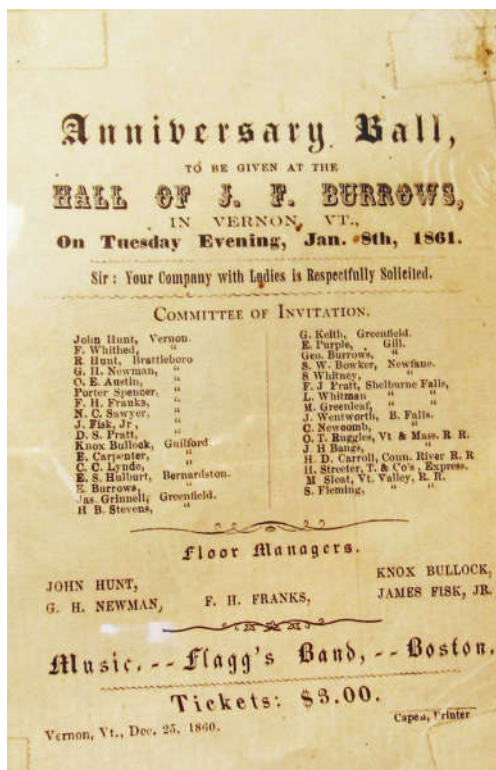
3 North Vernon station, Across from Hotel

Col. Burrows had family involved with the Railroad and so had some railroad connections. The railroad decided in the 1840's to extend the line North into Vermont. Jarvis donated the land for the Railroad Station, with the idea that Jarvis would build the ¹²Burrows House across the

street, and that's what happened. Jarvis put a clause in the deed that if the railroad ever abandoned the station the land would revert to the Burrows family. That's what happened in the 1980's. Bill Burrows remembered an old family story about the property going back to his family and when he checked the old deeds he was correct. So, after a 135 years the Burrows

family got the railroad station land back. It was about three acres. They just got the station land back, not the land used for the track.

Upon completion of the building, Jarvis began to have dances, or Balls as they were called. The first Ball was held in 1850. They were by invitation and were called by various names, for instance, Independence Day Balls, or Social ¹³Balls. One function often held yearly, was called the Anniversary Ball.



They were held around the 8th of January, which

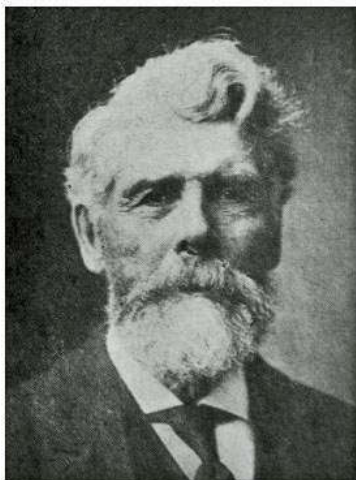
coincides with The Battle of New

Orleans that began on that date in 1815.

The last Burrows Anniversary ball of record was number 23, held January 5th 1872.

The Battle of New Orleans was a tactical and crushing victory by American General Andrew Jackson over the numerically superior (Americans were outnumbered 2-1) by British forces. British losses were extremely high and American losses were very low. Unknown to the Americans and the British, the battle was fought a few days after the treaty of Ghent was signed, so it had no strategic importance. However, it showed the world in a very decisive way that The American military was a force of to be taken seriously. It was a source of such immense pride to the American public that they celebrated Anniversary Day every year for most of the 19th century. It also paved the way for Jackson to become the 7th President of the United States.

One invitation was printed for each event ball, dance, hop, or whatever each one was called. The



Cotton Mather, Born In Marlboro, Vermont, March 19, 1833
Lineal Descent From Rev. Richard Mather

invitation usually included all the names of invited guests and places of residence of each invited person. Invited guests were men, who were asked to bring a lady companion. The names on the invitations were some of the prominent figures of the day.

Cotton Mather was a guest and was a direct descendant of the Mather's in Salem Mass.¹⁴ Cotton Mather's ancestor and namesake Cotton Mather, from the Salem witch trials

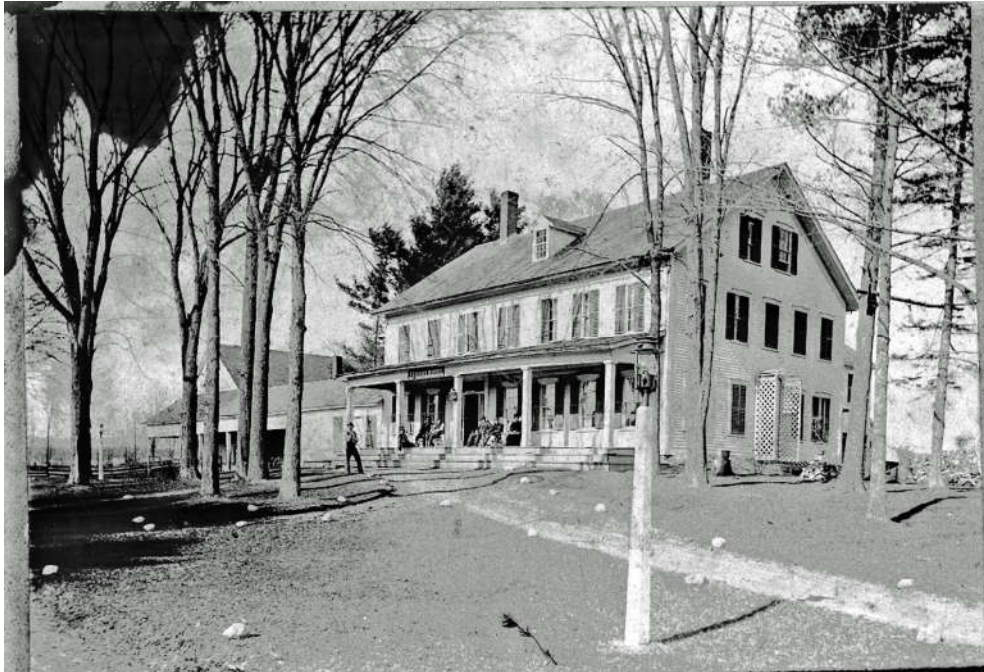
was a voice of reason in trying to end the trials and convictions.

A key feature of the Burrows house is the very large, beautiful dance Floor. It was made possible by adding a second floor to the rear "L" of the building over the kitchen and sheds. The floor structure is very thick and contains "springs" that allow the floor to actually move up and down.

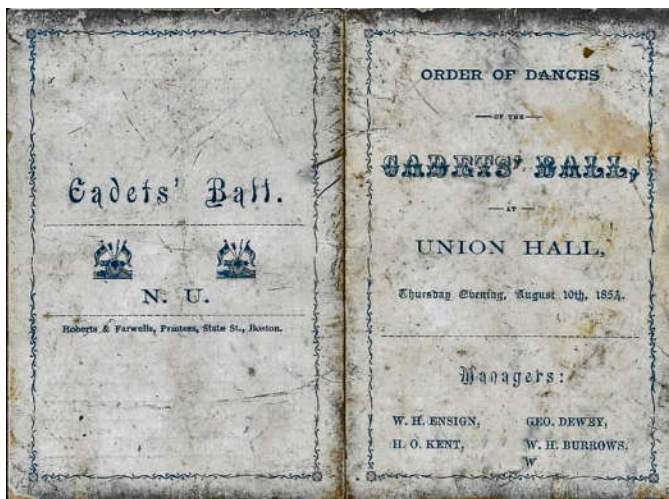
It is a very enjoyable experience for the dancers and relieves the stress on the structure caused by the dancing. These floors were very popular in the latter part of the 19th century, but there are not many that have survived. The spring floor of the Burrows House is still functional today

Reports of 40 couples and RR carloads full of people with a band, which came up for the parties when the Burrows House was first built, before the dance floor was added, don't seem credible. I can't imagine where 80 people could dance and move around, never mind RR cars full.

The 2nd floor ballroom added quite a lot of capacity, but that was an addition, not part of the initial construction.



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Hunt Burrows, Jarvis's son, and George Dewey attended Norwich University together and served as Floor Managers of the Cadet's Ball in 1854. There is a family story about

George being a Burrows House guest. No dates are given, but probably when he and George were cadets. However, Dewey was from Montpelier and the Burrows House was a convenient stop on the railroad line, so maybe he stayed there on one of his trips back and forth between Montpelier and Annapolis when he was at the navel college.

*Norwich University Ball*¹⁶



ADMIRAL DEWEY IN 1897.

Admiral Dewey had a long career, and was in many navel engagements, By all accounts he was a brilliant tactician and commander. His destruction of the Spanish Fleet at The Battle of

Manila made him one of the most popular men in America. He was the only 5-star Admiral, ever, in the US Navy¹⁷

Vermont Officers Reunion Society Collection
Courtesy Vermont Historical Society



Hunt Burrows Civil War uniform portrait

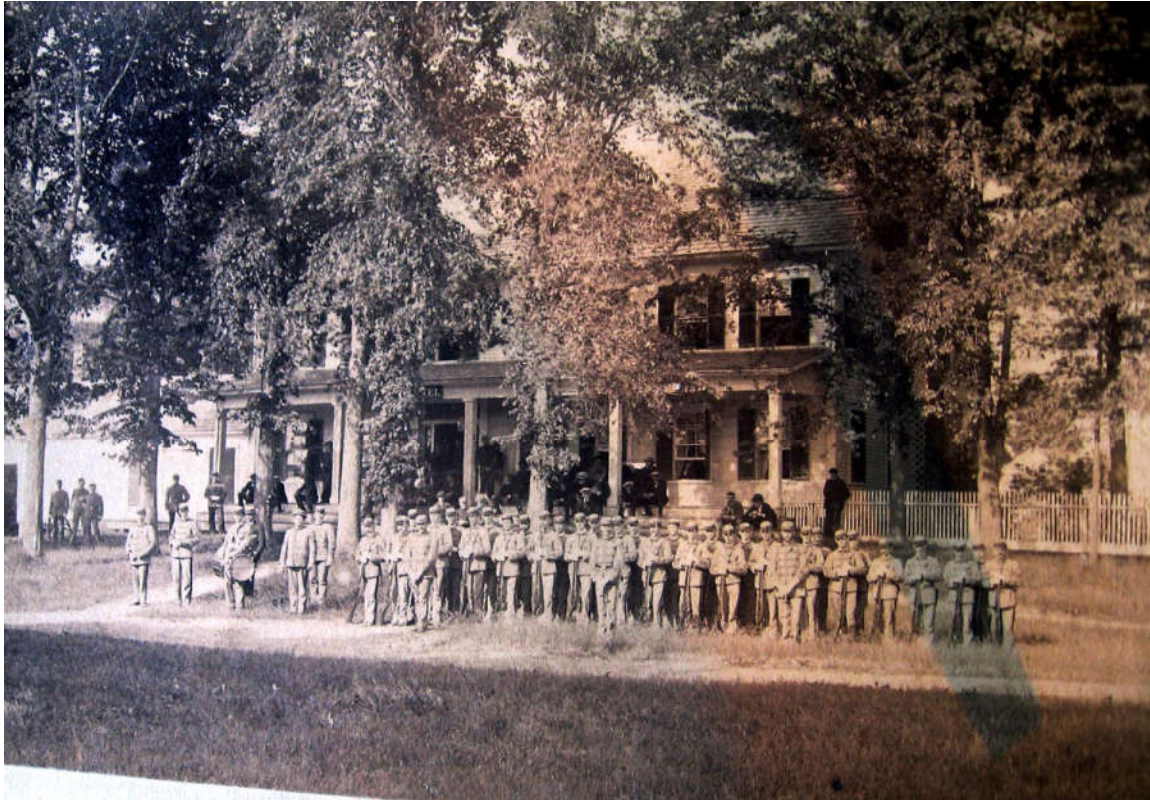
Captain Hunt Burrows¹⁸ 1863

The Vernon Guards

The Vernon Guards should not to be confused with the Vermont 11th Regiment.

This picture has been identified as being taken between 1870-1875, but I don't see how it could have been. A story appeared in the Vermont Phoenix, 31 Oct 1861 talking about the Vernon Guards and listing Hunt W Burrows as its Captain. That is most likely accurate. Quote from the

newspaper “a company of Home Guards has been raised; already numbering about 60 (count them in picture), for drill and any future emergency”.¹⁹ Picture²⁰



Vernon Guards, or Home Guards this picture should be from @ 31 Oct 1861

Another report in the Burlington paper, September 12, 1862, lists the officers of the 11th Regiment. The Adjutant is listed as Hunt W Burrows, Vernon. Hunt was sent to the war with this unit²¹

Hunt Burrows

Footnotes

¹ Newspapers.com, Vermont Phoenix Feb 14, 1896, farmhouse burns

² The History of the Town of Vernon by Artemas Henry Washburn, Esq. and his wife Lucinda Wright Baily Washburn, Vermont Historical Gazetteer.

³ Newspapers.com, Vermont Phoenix

⁴ Newspapers.com, Various papers

⁵ ibid

⁶ Vernon Museum Historical Collection

⁷ Currency.ha.com

⁸ BrattleboroHistory.com

⁹ Windham County Reformer, Mr. Davenports Letter 18February 1881,
The Vermont Phoenix and Farmer and Record, The First national Bank, 11 February 1881,
Newspapers.com
SOS Archives, Vermont

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¹¹ The History of the Town of Vernon by Artemas Henry Washburn, Esq. and his wife Lucinda Wright Baily Washburn, Vermont Historical Gazetteer.

¹² Vernon Museum Historical Collection

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ Brattleboro History.com

¹⁵ Vernon Museum Historical Collection

¹⁶ Burrows Family papers

¹⁷ The life and Achievements of Admiral Dewey, by Murat Halstead

¹⁸ Vermont Officers Reunion Society Collection, courtesy Vermont Historical Society

¹⁹ Vermont Phoenix Oct 31, 1861, newspapers.com

²⁰ Vernon Museum Historical Collection

²¹ The Burlington Weekly Sentinel, Newspapers.com