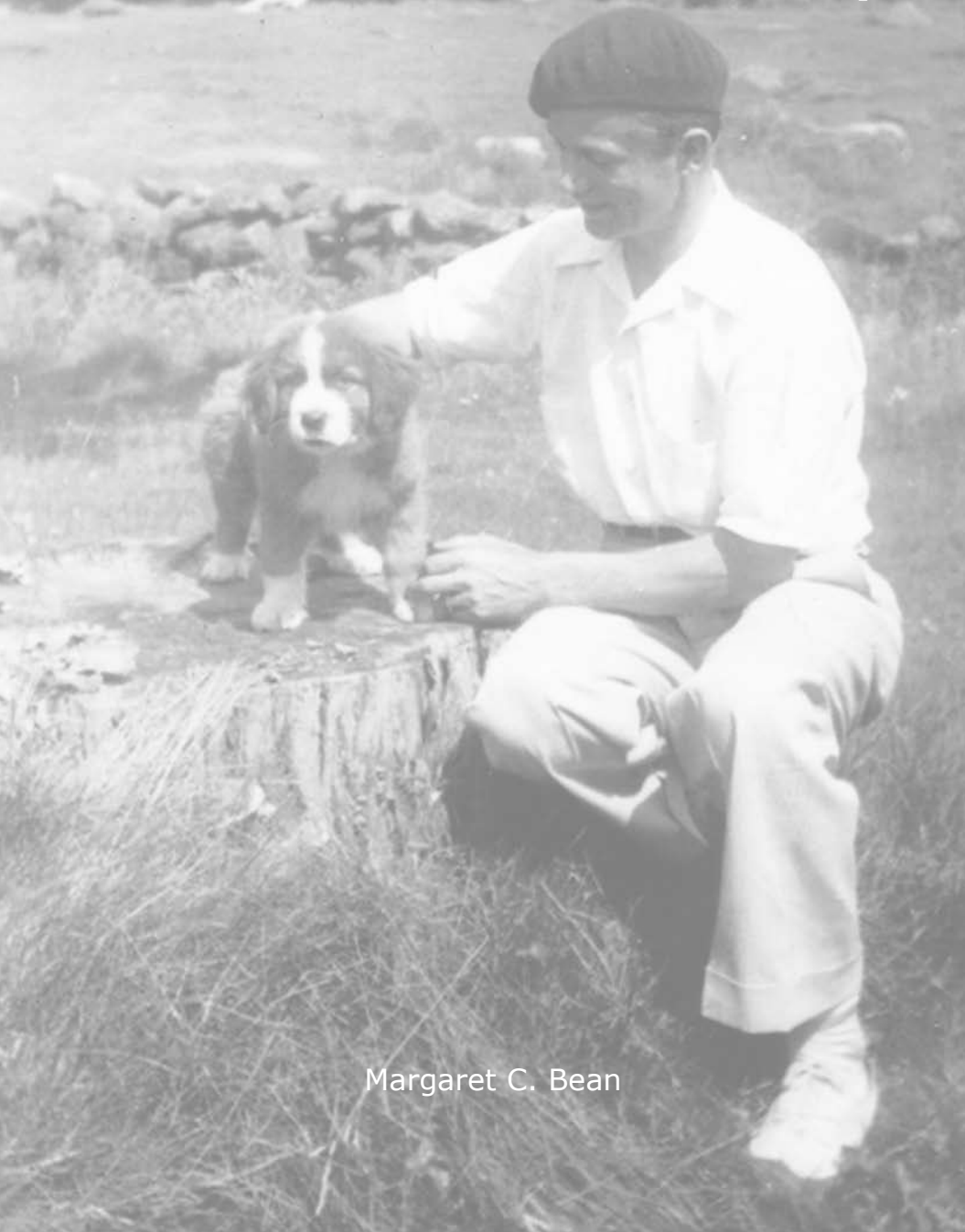


Viggo Brandt-Erichsen in Jaffrey



Margaret C. Bean



Wiggo Brandt-Eriksen

STUDIES IN JAFFREY HISTORY – No. 3
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**Viggo Brandt-Erichsen
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by

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Jaffrey, New Hampshire
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STUDIES IN JAFFREY HISTORY
General Editor, Robert B. Stephenson

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Foreword

IT WAS our good fortune to be among the many friends of Viggo and Joan Brandt-Erichsen. We later enjoyed a warm friendship with Viggo and Patt.

Viggo was an honored citizen of Jaffrey. He wore a European beret and had old-world manners; often would bow and kiss the hand of a woman friend.

Viggo often rode his horse, *Juno* and later his white horse, *Bobby*, up our hill. He would go by our house and on to the back road. He also had a Icelandic pony named *Jorgen*. It was a Danish name, he told us, and was pronounced *Yern*. In winter he would be on skis and *Jorgen* would pull him. If any member of our family was outdoors, he would stop for a brief visit. Viggo let our children ride *Jorgen* and—to our surprise and delight—when they moved to California he left *Jorgen* with us.

Once, when Viggo and Patt were living in The Stone House, we were invited to a Mystery Hunt Evening. After dinner we were given a list of hidden objects with clues to help in our search. They were cleverly hidden, even camouflaged. The last one to be found was a challenge. It blended in with the wallpaper. It was a fun and a memorable evening.

We visited Viggo and his family in Solvang and kept in touch over the years. It was a friendship we treasured and there are many good memories.





Viggo Brandt-Erichsen. He seldom was seen without his beret. (1)

Viggo Brandt-Erichsen in Jaffrey

THE EARLY YEARS

VIGGO AXEL BRANDT-ERICHSEN was born in on April 25, 1896 in Faxe, Denmark. He early on had been drawn to art and when only 14 left home on an extensive solo hiking adventure that was to include scenic, primitive portions of all the Scandinavian countries, and Russia. The carefully planned itinerary also made room for attending art schools, and studies under art masters throughout Europe.

While in England in 1922-24, he experimented with copper embossing and sculpturing. He enjoyed some commercial success, so much so that he was able to travel to France and take lodgings in Paris, where he stayed for several years. Here he studied sculpture under the great French master, Emile Bourdelle. During this time, his work in metalcraft began to turn to copper reliefs and related forms, and later to large-scale copper sculptures and wall plaques.

As a member of the famed “Les Amis de Montparnasse,” he was one of the artists who gathered in the Bohemian quarters of Paris, where he became a close friend and fellow artist of Pablo Picasso. Undoubtedly, Viggo’s artist friends found him refreshingly interesting and colorful, as most of his art training had been self-taught, and generated while out on the trails, and in the natural environment of the Scandinavian wilds and pastoral lands.

Emerging from all these art forms, while never giving up his first love of painting and sketching, sculpturing had begun to absorb his deepest interest, and remained first and foremost during the remainder of his life.



Viggo in Finland in 1917 during his vagabonding years. (2)



Viggo in Paris in 1924, two years before he first came to Jaffrey. (3)

COMING TO JAFFREY

IT WAS IN PARIS that he met Dorothy Caldwell, a young American who as a child had spent several summers in Jaffrey with her mother and sisters. Viggo and Dorothy married and soon had a child. Sadly, the newborn daughter died. Realizing that her own time was short, she recalled the beauties of Jaffrey and expressed a desire to be buried in the shadow of Mt. Monadnock. So in 1926, at the age of thirty, yielding to an artist's challenge of adventure and new lands, and carrying a personal commitment, Viggo set sail from France for America and specifically Jaffrey, bearing an urn containing the ashes of his wife and infant daughter. He took up residence at *The Ark* on Dublin Road and spent almost two years fashioning a mausoleum in the Old Burying Ground. He used rough granite from Fitzwilliam and on it carved a likeness of his dear Dorothy. The inscription on it reads simply: "Dorothy Caldwell, wife of Viggo Brandt-Erichsen, and infant Daughter. 1889-1926." Incorporated into the design are the burial and resurrection scenes that the



The tomb in the Old Burying Ground fashioned by Viggo for his wife, Dorothy Caldwell, and their infant daughter (4).



Dorothy Caldwell. A detail from the tomb in the Old Burying Ground (5).

sculptor had earlier employed in the Altar Piece that would later be installed in the United Church of Jaffrey. This was Viggo's first work in Jaffrey and can be seen today in the northwest corner of the cemetery.

While working on the memorial to his wife and daughter he, according to an article in the *The Union*, “. . . proved one of the most interesting guests the town has seen for many years. He has spoken to the Conant High School pupils, the American Legion Post, the Woman's Club, the Visiting Nurse Association, and not only talks entertainingly of his native land, but tells a thrilling story of an experience he had some years ago.” The article also described the snow sculptures Viggo did on the grounds of *The Ark*. Pictured is a young George Washington. The article went on to recount an odd experience that Viggo had while still in Europe.

He recalls distinctly the fact that he went swimming one afternoon, that he swam a long way from land, grew tired, turned over on his back to rest and floated awhile, and that is all he remembers until he found himself walking on a strange street, surrounded by strange faces, and clad in a suit he had never before seen.

Investigation proved that he was in Colchester, England. How he reached that town he has never been able to discover. He was without funds, was hungry, and through the aid of a friendly store-keeper, was taken, after some passing about from one person to another, in an effort to discover his nationality to the Danish Consul.

He told the story of going swimming, and a police investigation and work on the part of Scotland Yard detectives was never able to disclose the party or parties which landed him in England. He had a bad cut on his head, and the police theory simmered down to a belief that, while swimming, he had been struck by a smuggling vessel, taken on board, cared for, and landed, while still unconscious, on the shores of England by men who dared not reveal themselves to the authorities. It was three years, he says, while the wound was healing, before he fully recovered his memory of his earlier life.

THE BUDDIES MONUMENT

WITH THE MEMORIAL to his wife and child completed, Viggo was loathe to leave the spot to which he was bound by so strong a tie and cast about for excuses to linger. He was still staying at *The Ark*; indeed, he was a resident there for six years.

In the autumn of 1928 he appeared with a plaster model of a group of two soldiers, one strong determined man bringing back his wounded “Buddy” from the fighting front. He offered, if means could be found to erect a suitable stone on an appropriate site, to carve in bas-relief on the enduring rock the group shown. The members of John Humiston Post, American Legion, gratefully



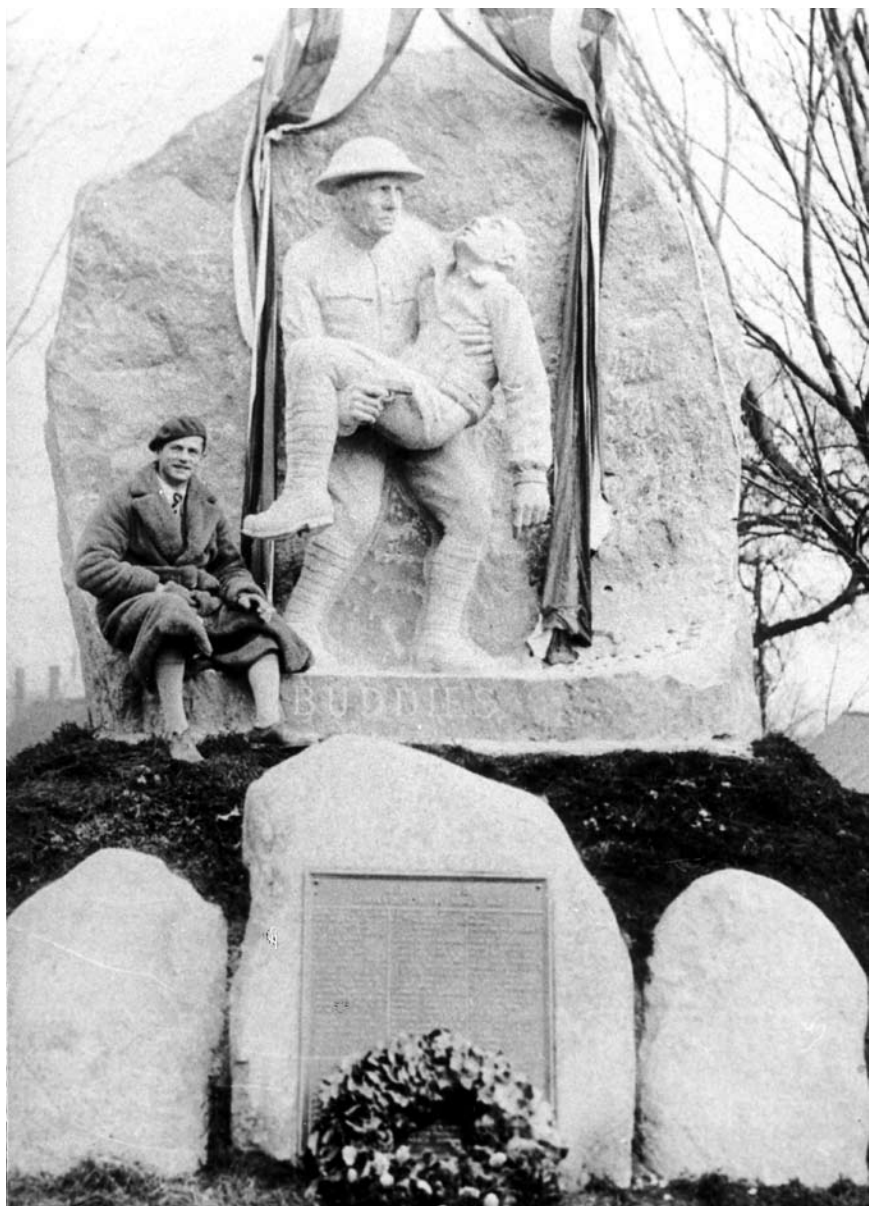
The giant stone destined to be the Buddies Monument being hauled up the hill on Mountain Road near the Meetinghouse. Viggo in the center on the stone with legs crossed (6).



Snow being shoveled under the sledge as it's hauled up the hill.
Note that some of the unneeded stone has been cut away to lighten the load (7).

accepted the offer, and, with the assistance of a group of citizens headed by Herbert N. Packard, soon had assurances of voluntary subscription of \$1,500, the estimated cost of the project above the gratuitous labor of the sculptor.

Search then was made far and wide for a native stone of proper proportion, of a suitable texture and without flaw. This proving unavailing, a visit was paid to the quarries of Fitzwilliam to learn the possibility of using a cut stone. Information gained there was to the effect that to move a stone of such heroic dimensions so great a distance was impracticable; and the searchers were returning, well-nigh disheartened, when, at the north side of the turnpike, about



Viggo Brandt-Erichsen and the Buddies Monument on the day of its dedication, November 11, 1930. The bronze plaque in front lists 104 "Jaffrey Boys in the World War." It was discovered later that another 18 had served bringing the total to 122 (8).

a mile west of Jaffrey Center, a stone half embedded in earth was spied which promised to meet the requirements. Further inspection disclosed it to be of almost the same proportions as the model, with no visible flaw, but so huge—experts estimated it to weigh forty tons as it lay—that to move it to the center of Jaffrey and erect it there seemed almost impossible.

But Walter E. Emerson of Fitzwilliam had had long experience in handling these major products of the granite hills, and he daringly undertook the work. Superfluous stone was removed where it lay; it was loaded upon a sturdy frame of oak; and, waiting until the ground was firmly frozen lest the surface of the roadway be completely destroyed, the monster was slowly and painstakingly guided, on rollers, little by little during six weeks, to downtown Jaffrey. There a solid concrete bed had been prepared and upon it in due time the stone was reared without mishap; a rough shelter was constructed and the sculptor began his task.

For nearly two years Viggo carefully chipped away with hand and electrical chisel until at long last the dead stone took life. By ones



Some of the crowd that assembled for the dedication on November 11, 1930 (9).

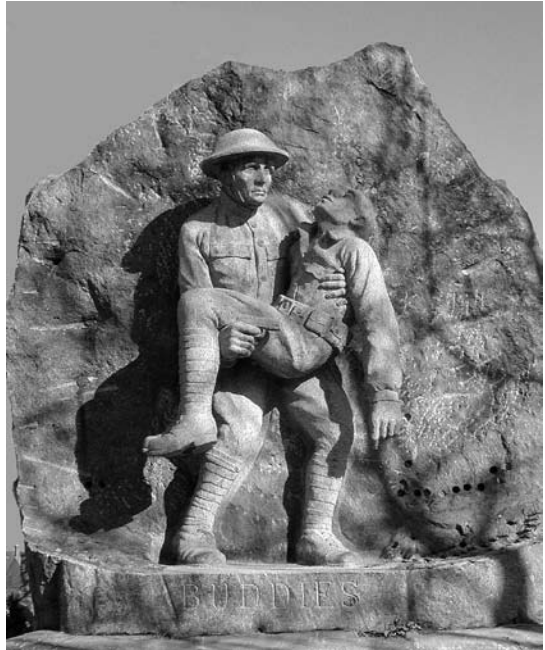
and twos and threes, thousands lingered by the rude door to marvel at his skill. . . . Finally the day came when the cover was removed and there appeared to view the completed Memorial, on the front the handiwork of man, on the reverse that of nature in the form of glacial striae.

From the ground to the top of the stone is twenty-five feet. The standing figure is eight feet high and so lifelike is the carving that veins on the hands

and even the knotted lacing of a puttee can be discerned. And the whole stone proved so sound that no flaw or crack was uncovered to mar the perfection of the work. With self-effacing modesty the sculptor allows his work to tell his story, only the small chiselled letters “Viggo Brandt-Erichsen 1928–1930” on the easterly edge of the stone identify it. The soldier carrying his wounded “Buddy” was modeled by David H. Harling, and Joseph D. Donohue was the model for the wounded “Buddy.”

The work of carving proving more difficult than anticipated owing to the extreme hardness of the stone, contributions were insufficient to meet all expenses and at the 1930 March town meeting \$1,200 was appropriated to complete the cost.

On Armistice Day, November 11, 1930, the War Memorial was dedicated with suitable ceremony, a principal feature being a parade in which six hundred legionnaires participated, including in addition



to members of John Humiston Post, representatives of the American Legion Posts of Peterborough, Keene, Marlborough, Wilton, Greenville, Winchendon, Gardner and Fitchburg. The Women's Auxiliary Units of Jaffrey, Peterborough, Keene and Marlborough also appeared in the parade.

The Reverend William J. Cavanaugh, rector of St. Patrick Church and a member of the citizens' committee, presided at the formal dedicatory exercises and introduced the two principal speakers, General Clarence R. Edwards, commanding officer of the Twenty-sixth (Yankee) Division, American Expeditionary Forces, to which most of the local World War veterans who saw overseas service were attached; and Governor Charles W. Tobey. Viggo made the speech of presentation; the Memorial was unveiled by Mrs. Carrie R. Humiston, mother of the only Jaffrey boy to be killed in action; acceptance was by Selectman Fred L. Cournoyer; and Hon. Albert Annett expressed the appreciation of the community for the wonderful tribute thus given by the sculptor.

During the whole of the events of the day all available space was filled by spectators and careful observers estimated the total attendance to have been at least seven thousand.

An unknown number of miniature versions of the monument were cast in bronze, some still in the possession of a few fortunate Jaffrey citizens.

Viggo's son, Thor, later remarked that his father ". . . was in the Danish Army in World War I, so the inspiration for the memorial came from those years of hardship, and exposure to the heroism of the time."¹

SETTLING IN

VIGGO MET AND MARRIED Joan Crowley in 1931. From Massachusetts, she was very gifted musically and once entertained her friends with a musical comedy she had written. She played the piano and sang the lyrics. In 1938, twelve years after first coming to Jaffrey, Viggo bought Highland Farm on Highland Avenue. The property was first settled by Ebenezer Hathorn in the 18th century; later it was known as the Mower farmstead, and still later the Arthur Buss farm. Joan and Viggo made their home there and in 1939, their son, Thor, was born.

Joan died in 1944 when Thor was only five years old. Her death was the delayed result of a tragic happening when they were on their honeymoon at *The Ark* in 1931. They were staying in a cottage on the property and when a fire broke out and Joan, in a panic, jumped out of the window. Although it was not a great height, she badly injured her back. When she later became pregnant, the pregnancy was normal. Thor was a fine healthy boy, but Joan was not physically



Highland Farm, the Brandt-Erichsen home from 1938 to 1946 (11).



Joan on *Juno* (12).



Joan in the sleigh with *Jørgen* in front of Joan and Viggo's house in Groton, Massachusetts, where they lived for a short time before moving to Highland Farm (13).



Viggo and *Benny*,
the St. Bernard puppy,
at Highland Farm (14).



Joan and Viggo's son,
Thor Brandt-Erichsen,
at Highland Farm (15).

strong and her health continued to decline. She was just shy of 40 when she died.

In 1933 Joan brought suit against the proprietors of *The Ark* and was awarded \$25,000, described in the October 13, 1933 issue of the *Jaffrey Recorder and Monadnock Breeze* as “one of the largest verdicts given in Cheshire County Superior Court in recent years.” The verdict was to be appealed to the Supreme Court; it’s unclear whether this was ever done and, if so, what the outcome might have been.

Joan is buried in Conant Cemetery. Just as he had done for his first wife, Viggo set out to create a very personal memorial to her, although one very different from the one in the Old Burying Ground. It was quite an elaborate assemblage of naturalistic, almost animalistic elements, including deer, a dog, squirrels, a rabbit, a peacock, vegetation, a water pool and perched on top of the



Viggo's very personal memorial to his second wife in Conant Cemetery (16). Sadly it was vandalized. Later a simple flat marker was installed (17).

headstone itself, Pan playing his flute. Unfortunately, it was later vandalized and the gravesite now only features a flat marker simply inscribed “Joan Miriam Crowley 1906-1944 Wife of Viggo Brandt-Erichsen.”



ANOTHER BEGINNING

WITHIN A YEAR Viggo was again married. His new wife was Martha ('Patt') Mott of Rochester, New York, a gifted and well-known artist. He brought her back to Jaffrey and they became a family with Thor and Patt's daughter, Jean. The Highland Farm was sold to Flavel Lynch in January 1946 (it is owned today by Richard, the son). Viggo and Pat then purchased The Stone House on Main Street, now the St. Patrick convent. This handsome house was built for Jonas Melville, a leading Jaffrey citizen over many years. Here the family lived for the rest of their Jaffrey days.



Viggo's third wife, Martha "Patt" Mott, an accomplished artist in her own right (18).



The Stone House. The Brandt-Erichsens lived here from 1946 to 1949. When it was built for Jonas Melville in 1829 it was described as "... the best house on the turnpike from Keene to Boston." It is presently the St. Patrick Convent (19).

THE ALTAR PIECE

IN THE EARLY 1940s, Viggo donated a copper bas-relief art work to The United Church of Jaffrey. The 9 foot by 5 foot art work was installed in the Parish House—then the old Baptist Church that stood where the Post Office now is—and was dedicated on Sunday, September 21, 1941. Speaking for the church, Jason C. Sawyer—judge, farmer and leading Jaffrey citizen—remarked: “As we contemplate the skill, thought, the time and devotion that went into that rare work of art, we are overwhelmed.”²

It had been created for a competition in Paris in 1920. While executing it, Viggo had to immerse copper in a hot vat of melted pitch to make it soft and pliable. The pitch had to be stirred with a stout stick to get the lumps out. The stick became embedded in a thick lump, and when Viggo grabbed the stick to break the lump, it suddenly gave way and both of his hands went into the boiling pitch. The burns were so bad that his hands were made stiff for the rest of his life.

Unsuccessful in the competition, Viggo retained the work, finally shipping it in sections to his sister in Denmark in 1926 when he left Paris for America. He later asked to have it sent to Jaffrey where he re-assembled it, with help from Justin Vinal and Ernest Pratt of The United Church.

The Altar Piece was later moved into the sanctuary itself as a backdrop to the altar—where it may be seen today—and was re-dedicated on All Saints’ Sunday, October 30, 1983. The artist’s son, Thor, came from Anchorage, Alaska, to be present for the dedication.

The Altar Piece is in a gothic shape and is divided into story-telling compartments, depicting the major Biblical scenes:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Arched Section at Top: | God the Creator. |
| Top Left Panel: | Garden of Eden with the fruit still on tree, Before the Fall. |

- Lower Left Panel: Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden.
After the Fall.
- Top Right Panel: The Nativity. The star appearing to a shepherd.
- Lower Right Panel: Mary and Joseph's Flight to Egypt with the infant Jesus.
- Central Large Panel: The Crucifixion. His Mother Mary and Disciple John.
- Bottom Right Panel: Christ being prepared for burial.
- Bottom Left Panel: Resurrected Christ appearing to Mary outside the tomb.

Patt commented that “As an artist, I consider it his finest and most original work. There have been very few sculptors who have mastered the art of bas-relief. I suspect that because Viggo started out as a painter, he developed the pictorially satisfying results in bas-relief. In my opinion the greatest example [of bas-relief] are the Bronze Doors of the Baptistry in Florence by Ghiberti. I think Viggo must have drawn his inspiration from them.”³



Viggo's son, Thor, in front of the Altar Piece when it was re-dedicated on October 30, 1983 (20).

ANOTHER WAR MEMORIAL

AT THE OPPOSITE END of Memorial Park in downtown Jaffrey stands a second war memorial fashioned by Viggo. During and after World War II he worked on an extraordinary symbolic model for that war, and when it was presented to the voters in Town Meeting in March 1948, it met with strong opposition from some of the returned veterans who regarded the memorial as a personal tribute rather than from a historical and dedicatory angle. The proposed project was turned down and shortly thereafter Viggo and his family moved to California.

However, before he left Jaffrey he made the smaller and more modest memorial for World War II that we see today. The models for this memorial were Lillian LaFreniere and Hilma (Ruuspakka) Brooks. Incorporated into the memorial are the names of the nine Jaffrey men who gave their lives in the War. (These are listed and described in Volume III of the Town History.) It's usually described as the "Gold Star Mother's Praying." What was probably done as a full-scale study for the memorial may be seen in the upper floor of the John Humiston American Legion Post No. 11, framed and hanging on the wall.

Viggo's son, Thor, later said that he could ". . . remember when the piece was being created at the studio in Jaffrey, in what was formerly a carriage house behind what is now the Catholic school . . . That was in 1947 and 1948. The expense of casting bronze and the scarcity of foundries at that time encouraged Viggo to use high-fired ceramics instead."⁴



The World War II memorial in Memorial Park. This was Viggo's last artistic effort in Jaffrey (21).

Probably a study for the World War II memorial. It hangs in the John Humiston American Legion Post No. 11 on Webster Street (22).





Patt and Viggo in front of The Stone House in 1949 shortly before their move to California (23).

TO CALIFORNIA

IN SEPTEMBER 1949, Viggo and Patt and their three children, Jean (14), Thor (10) and David (2), left Jaffrey for California. They settled the village of Solvang which had a large Danish-American population. To Viggo's delight, and his family's astonishment, they were embraced in Viggo's native tongue, for at that time, the Danish language was nearly as readily spoken, in the stores and streets, as English.

So delighted, and confident were they that Solvang was the answer to their hopes and prayers, that during the first month they purchased six acres of farmland in the center of town, drew plans, and began construction of their future home, studio, and workshop, on a portion of the six acres.

As in rural Denmark, the construction became a family project, with all the heavy work managed by the husband, the less strenuous jobs passed on to the family. Also of rural origin, the floor plan was adapted from typical Danish farmhouse design.

All the redwood beams and heavy woodwork were adeptly hand-hewn by Viggo, with the sides of the beams coated with tar and turpentine by Patt.

Handcrafted wrought iron and copper *repousse*, are featured about certain areas of the dwelling: including hinges, protective gates, the fireplace screens, and picturesque scrollwork.

Handpainted wood panels by Patt, contribute to the traditional Danish country motif of the kitchen, restored to an early period. Wood carvings by Viggo help to enhance finished details overall. Pine tables and counter tops accent the floral-painted woodwork, in the manner of Danish homes of the 19th century. And wood flooring has been laid throughout the rooms, in order to recreate the early-day Denmark appearance.

With the impressive front door as a background, Viggo sculpted a stoneware statue of an Icelandic pony in the patio entrance. This was, of course, *Jorgen* who had stayed in Jaffrey. The house was named *Elverhoy*, a name taken from a Danish play about female trolls (*elver*) who live in a cave (*hoy*).⁵

Viggo died in Solvang in 1955, not yet 60 years old. Patt survived him for many years, dying in 1983. She left the house they had built and the grounds to the Santa Ynez Valley Historical Society with the provision that it should become what is now the Elverhoy Museum of History and Art. It features history of the town of Solvang as well as Viggo and Patt's art work.

Viggo and Patt are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in the town of Ballard, California.



The entrance to the house in Solvang with the statue of the Icelandic pony (24).

Viggo Brandt-Erichsen

Notes

The opening section on THE EARLY YEARS is taken almost without change from a brochure entitled *Elverhoy Danish Heritage and Fine Arts Museum* issued by the Elverhoy Museum, Solvang, California. The section TO CALIFORNIA also draws heavily on this source. The sections ON COMING TO JAFFREY and THE BUDDIES MONUMENT are largely from volume I of the *History of Jaffrey* by Albert Annett and Alice E.E. Lehtinen (1937), again with only minor changes. Extensive portions in COMING TO JAFFREY are from an article in *The Union* that appeared on March 7, 1927. The section ANOTHER WAR MEMORIAL draws upon volume III of the *History of Jaffrey* by Alice E.E. Lehtinen (1971). Information included in *A Biographical Synopsis about the Artist Viggo Axel Brandt-Erichsen*, a three-page typescript on the letterhead of The United Church of Jaffrey, was used extensively throughout.

¹ Letter to the author from Thor Brandt-Erichsen, April 4, 2005.

² *Dedication of Altar Piece made by Viggo Brandt-Erichsen . . . Remarks by Jason C. Sawyer*. One-page mimeograph sheet presumably issued by the Church.

³ Letter to the author from Patt Brandt-Erichsen, July 2, 1976.

⁴ Letter to the author from Thor Brandt-Erichsen, June 7, 2000.

⁵ Mentioned in an article in Santa Barbara *News-Press*, October 5, 1983.

Sources

The sources of the photographs are as follows: Front cover, Foreword (Viggo skjoring with *Jørgen*) and Numbers 8, 12, 13, 14 and 23, Thor Brandt-Erichsen. Back cover and Numbers 4, 5, 10, 11, 17, 19, 21 and 22, Robert B. Stephenson. Numbers 1 and 18, brochure entitled *Elverhoy Danish Heritage and Fine Arts Museum*. Numbers 2, 3 and 15, *Business Line* magazine, July-August 1996. Numbers 6 and 7, Richard E. Smith. Number 9, George W. Stetson. Numbers 16 and 20, from the collection of the author. Number 24, from a Christmas card sent to the author by Viggo and Patt, 1953. Viggo's signature on the back cover and on page 28 was provided by Thor Brandt-Erichsen.

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