



## Olcott Falls Quest

### **Wilder, Vermont**

Difficulty: Easy

Special Features: Historical

Walking Conditions: Pavement

Duration: 1:00

Bring: Compass, maybe a picnic to have by the river

*To get there: The Quest begins at the parking lot at Datamann in Wilder. Datamann is at 1994 Hartford Avenue (Route 5). From the south: head north for 1.8 miles on Route 5 from the traffic light at the intersection of Routes 5 and 14 in White River Junction. The parking lot is on the left before the left turn at the church. From the north: head south for 3 miles on Route 5 from the traffic light at the intersection of Routes 5 and 10A near I-91 in Norwich. The parking lot is on the right about a block after bearing right where Gillette Street T's into Route 5 in Wilder.*

### **Clues:**

Welcome to Olcott Falls

From back in time before there were malls.

Park your buggy at Datamann, the site of the old IGA.

Follow our clues along our historic quest today.

Start moving your feet

Across to Hawthorne Street

Walk on the left side, one house down.

Now cross over and look around.

With your back to 76 and 62 you will see

A house with a twin left of thee.

Just in case you missed it, look beyond the STOP sign!

Both houses built by Goss have similar lines.

By the IGA once lived Collamer Abbott

Professor, journalist, and taking photos was his habit.

On your right, four houses as you engage your feet.  
And continue along Hawthorne until you hit a new street.  
This town was planned before any building did occur.  
Which gives us organized streets you will probably concur.

At Hawthorne's end, a right will take you to the end of the block.  
At the corner of Locust turn your body half a clock.  
With your back to the school, let your eyes roam  
Right in front of you is a large white home  
Which was once an 1890 Methodist Church  
Its old steeple is what you search  
No longer there, it sports instead a bay window.  
From church to residence in '31 a transformation it did undergo.

Spin around and head past the school.  
Filled for years with many a rule.  
This old place was once made of wood  
And hosted children from all the hood.  
In 1912 it went from wood to brick  
For an exploding population the change did the trick.  
Its mission is shifting to those with special needs,  
A total remodel in 2020 our eyes did see.

Keep on movin'  
While you imagine this town a groovin'.  
This was once a main street.  
Filled with the pace of many feet.

Soon you'll arrive at another building of brick.  
Here you will need to let your feet stick.  
We introduce you to a brand new face  
Who donated money for this old space.  
Charles Wilder had a special arrangement  
That this place be built for reading and children's entertainment.  
Look towards the back, a surprise of the Upper Valley  
We kid you not, a two lane bowling alley.  
Many a young one remembers setting pins.  
A dangerous job when that ball starts to spin.  
Enough of that tale, come on, let's haul  
After paying respects to those who sacrificed it all.

Now cross over Fern and take a peek  
It is the Thomas Gould house of which we speak.  
You will know it by the tiny window on top  
Designed by a woman, this house makes you stop  
One of the only professionally designed homes in the town  
Inside, groceries and men's clothing were once found.

Go back up Fern to continue your journey.  
You'll see many more things that are legendary.  
Once on Route 5 head on across, we ask.  
Heading south on Hartford Avenue is your task.

Count 5 as you go 1893 identical houses and still they stand.  
Built by Epen Sargent's talented hand.  
Start by passing the house of greyish blue  
Until you arrive at the driveway of number two  
Its white garage was once a butcher shop  
Dig in the dirt around it and old bones will be your crop.  
Now back on up around the corner of Fern with swift feet  
You'll get a side view of the tiny window where they handed out meat.  
Once done that task go back past the famous five  
Search each building for matching stars that managed to survive.  
Head down to the corner and cross the road again.  
Down Depot to Norwich Ave where you have already been.  
As you move along, look for the windows of Schaal.  
This once was a store where kids had a ball.  
Johnny Bananas (John Sciapa) ran this place  
For kids in town this was a welcoming space.  
Nick named for the bananas that hung from the ceiling  
Free ice cream for young ones made it appealing.

Keep on walking and imagine a scene  
Where stores, post office and restaurants once did gleam.  
Walk until you reach the last of the tall lamps  
Look across on the corner to the place that once sold stamps.  
Note the false front which was a style back in the day.  
Some places here still display that old way.

Now cross the bridge going up and over.  
Take just a minute to stop and hover.  
Look on down at the tracks below.  
Straight as the street, don't you know.

Move on up so the river is at your back  
See the boarding house up from the old train track.  
Built in 1883 by the Olcott Falls Mill  
To house its workers right up on the hill.  
It also held an ice house and a shed  
Ice was brought up from the river on a sled.  
Now follow the dirt path down the road  
There is more to learn to crack this code.

Walk all the way past the old boat landing  
Where the land juts out is where you should be standing.  
It's the old Pedestrian Bridge foundation to Lebanon, New Hampshire.  
So stop right here and imagine this picture.  
Charles Wilder again had his hand  
In all that happened on this land.  
Paper mill owner and prominent town member  
He loved this place and was a big money lender.  
He made a great offer one day  
If they build a bridge he was willing to pay  
Twelve grand for the bridge on one condition  
That they name the town Wilder in his recognition.  
It is with good fortune the town has remained  
Unlike the bridge which the water has claimed.

Now make your way back and find the path on the right.  
A little bit of nature hides the Paper Mill site.  
Walk parallel to the water and you will note  
The river where once great logs did float.  
To support the mill started by Wilder Brothers.  
Worked by Indians, Irish, French, Italians and others.  
At the Y stay right and note metal and concrete  
Keep moving along with the nimblest of feet.  
As you come out of the woods look low on the right  
For signs of the Granite State line, what a site!  
Now follow the power lines that head on north  
To the road it dumps into you should go forth.

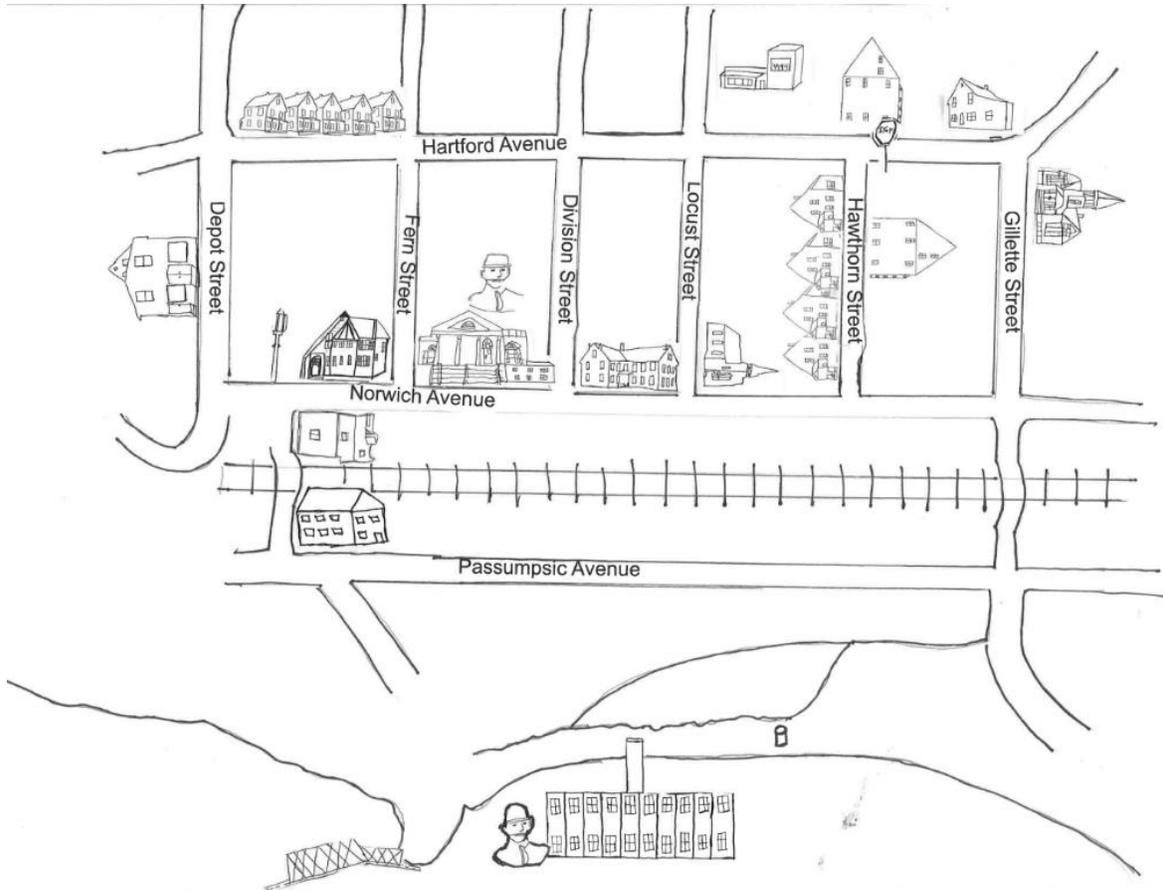
At the end of the path you can now choose  
To make your way back or walk more to peruse,  
Another bridge foundation at the end of the path to the right  
If you needed to take a vehicle over the river this was your site.

Walking up Gillette Street, over the train track.  
Note the old mill homes along the way  
Still standing after all of these years on this day.  
At the end of the street the church is your destination  
Built in 1880, a Texan responsible for its restoration.  
Inside the church we heard an organ once was hidden  
Behind a wall its pipes and pedals once abandoned.  
It was restored in 2010 by AD Moore  
Check out the Wilder Center website to find out more.  
Look above the church, a Seth Thomas clock of purple  
Keeping time to this day it is truly a miracle  
Donated by the Palmer family in 1928  
Connected to a bell which tolls the hour, isn't that great?

Although not complete it is time to find our treasure  
On the west side of the church look around with pleasure.  
Down on the ground near the property line  
You will find more information about this silly rhyme.  
Sign yourself in and check out the old Wilder scene  
This whole Quest you now need to reconvene.

Heading back to your vehicle it is not yet time to quit  
You will pass the 1898 Palmer store where they sold quite a bit  
From buggy whips to pocket watches to overshoes and grain  
For old Tige the horse who delivered groceries around the lane.  
With a ferret in the basement kept to hunt mice and rats  
The Palmers sold to the Abbots, that's how we learned those stats.  
As you come to the end if you haven't had your fill  
Of churches, homes, stores and the old paper mill.  
Find the Wilder Village Historic District website  
To discover more details of this old historic delight.

This Quest was created in 2016 by Mary Bouchard and her students from Hartford High School.



**Did you know?**

Source: <http://nec-sia.org/pdf/WRJ%20Falls.pdf>, <http://nec-sia.org/>